

 pan books

TIMESLIP

From the successful television series
written by Bruce Stewart and based on an original
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A PAN ORIGINAL

TIMESLIP

BRUCE STEWART



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Chapter 31

PROLOGUE

ARTHUR GRIFFITHS WATCHED Sarah cross the Ministry field as he ate his cheese sandwich and swigged his beer.

‘Poor kid,’ he thought, ‘lives in a world of her own.’ She was moving slowly from left to right, arms outstretched as if feeling an imaginary wall. Then she disappeared. Sudden, instant, complete. Gone.

‘Sarah,’ he shouted as he pelted downhill.

Somewhere near where Sarah had vanished he found a grubby white handkerchief. That was all. He turned and ran for the road to the village.

In Whitehall at about 2.30 that afternoon Murray of Naval Intelligence returned from lunch and his secretary handed him a telex message.

MISSING PERSON 12.8.70.

SARAH TILLEY/F/AGE 15.3/HT 5'2"/EYES BLUE/HAIR
DARK/DISTINGUISHING MARKS NIL/REPORT MADE BY
ARTHUR GRIFFITHS FARM LABOURER/BOWDEN COTTAGES/
ST OSWALD/RUTLAND/TO LOCAL POLICE STATION/12.40/

12.8.70/GRIFFITHS REPORT: 'SHE WAS WALKING ACROSS FIELD ABOVE OLD NAVAL STATION. I SAW HER STOP AND WALK TO RIGHT AND LEFT. SHE WAS FEELING AROUND LIKE. THEN SHE DISAPPEARED. JUST WASN'T THERE'/

SEARCH IN NAVAL STATION UNPRODUCTIVE / GRIFFITHS GAVE POLICE HANDKERCHIEF PICKED UP IN FIELD / DOGS LOST SCENT IN AREA INDICATED GRIFFITHS.

'Mr Traynor is in your office, and the St Oswald file,' said the secretary.

'Thanks,' said Murray. 'Look up trains to Leicester and arrange a car and a room at The Bull in St Oswald.'

A man in late middle age, quietly dressed, with greying hair and deep-set eyes, turned from the window as Murray entered his office. He read the telex message and handed it back.

'Better go as soon as possible,' said Murray. 'Frances is fixing transport and a room at the inn. Want the file?'

'Seen it too often,' said Traynor gently.

'Well, best of luck.' Murray looked hard at him.

'I know how much it means to you.'

THE WRONG END OF TIME

1

LIZ AND SIMON STOOD TOGETHER. It was early evening and quiet. By the crumbling wall a peeling notice that had once been black and white said:

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
KEEP OUT

‘This is the place,’ said Simon Randall.

Liz looked across the curving hillside. It was shaped like half a shallow bowl.

‘That’s where my dad was in the war,’ she said. ‘Let’s go down to those old sheds.’

‘It’s a prohibited area.’

Liz looked at the boy, sizing him up. A year older than her, nearly at O-levels, quiet and reserved, always with his nose in books. ‘He’s stuffy,’ Liz told herself in a rage. ‘A fab fortnight it’s going to be, stuck in a caravan with him.’ But she held back her irritation.

‘Do you think Sarah’s down there somewhere?’ she asked.

‘I don’t expect so. The police didn’t find anything. They say she’s always getting lost.’

‘Creepy place though, isn’t it?’

‘I thought you wanted to go down there?’

‘I do but I’m not going on my own.’

They began their descent across the grass.

Simon pointed towards the sheds. ‘There’s the remains of an aerial in front of that concrete building. Did your father ever tell you what this place was used for?’

‘I asked him but he says he doesn’t remember. I suppose he’s not allowed to say. Anyway, he was only a rating.’

‘I can hear something like a radio signal,’ Simon said.

‘You’re not just saying that, are you?’

‘No. Keep quiet. Listen.’

Wind rustled delicately in the grass but the half bowl of land was otherwise uncannily silent. Boy and girl stood rigidly attending. ‘That’s it,’ then ‘Sssh’ they said together, laughed and fell silent, listening to the chatter of sound that seemed to come from the deserted Naval Station below.

Simon said quietly, ‘It’s like a sound track. Electronic noise. Some of it’s signals, but some is just distortion or background noise.’

Liz sat down. ‘Where does it come from, though?’ she said.

Simon had sat down too and was rubbing his cheek.

‘There must be some kind of apparatus down there.’

As he looked towards the ruins he shook his head. ‘You wouldn’t expect anything to be working in that place, though. Come on, let’s go down.’ Liz sprang to her feet and rushed down the hill. Simon followed more slowly. He saw her running at full tilt and then suddenly stop and bounce on to the grass. He pulled up alongside her. ‘What happened? Did you trip?’

‘I ran into something,’ said Liz soothing her backside. She sat up and looked into the grass. ‘Just a yard or two away. Sort of elastic. I

bounced.'

Simon advanced, lifting his feet high, looking for a tripwire. He stopped. Along the full length of his body, against his forehead and cheek, all the way down his flank, thigh and leg, a cold, gently trembling presence prevented further advance. He leapt back and squatted down by Liz.

'There's a barrier there. Invisible,' he whispered.

'Show me where,' she replied, whispering too.

They edged down the slope until both could press a fingertip against it.

'It isn't alive, is it?'

'Shouldn't think so,' Simon answered. 'Feels horrid,' he continued, 'hard and soft at the same time.'

'The signals are louder here,' said Liz. The bleeps were beating into her head.

Simon pressed the wall, hard then soft, hard then soft, trying to affect the signals. No result. They drew back and tried looking at it from various angles.

'Some sort of electric fence?' Liz asked.

'A force field?'

'You've been watching too much telly! '

'Let's try walking round it. It can't go on for ever, right across England.'

'You go thataway. I'll go off to the right.'

They walked away from each other, dragging a hand along the barrier. Simon struck it with the edge of his left hand at each step, Liz ran, pressing her right hand flat against it. She ran faster and faster...

She felt as if something had spun her like a top. It seemed to go on for dreamlike hours. She came to rest standing on grass in a dark

place. 'If I open my eyes,' she thought, 'what will I see?' With a sob of terror she realized that her eyes were open. Night had fallen. She took a step backwards in fear and once again felt herself spinning. She was in the sunlight again.

'Simon, Simon, Simon,' she screamed at the top of her voice.

He rushed up to her. 'What happened?'

'There's a gap here and when you go in it's dark. Nighttime.'

'Where's the gap?'

'Just in front of us, but be careful. I ran through and spun round and round for hours. Was I gone long?'

'Couple of seconds.'

Simon felt forwards and found the barrier. Moving carefully left, his hand slipped round a thick edge. The signals increased in intensity as he touched it.

The gap was a yard wide. The barrier began again, unbroken, a couple of feet uphill from the breach. He stood up and felt both edges again; tried an arm inside. It disappeared and he snatched it back.

Liz,' he called. 'I'll mark this edge with my book.' He took a paperback from his pocket and laid it where he could feel the gap began. He hacked the grass with his heel to mark the other side.

'You still hearing signals?' asked Liz.

'Yes, and a lot louder. Morse, bleeps, and I thought I heard voices.'

'Me too. Do you really think it comes from those sheds?'

'Yes—no. And I'm not sure we're hearing it. Put your fingers in your ears.'

They plugged their ears and watched one another. Simon's eyes popped.

'Makes no difference at all,' he gasped.

‘To me neither,’ said Liz quietly. ‘What’s it mean?’

‘I want to go in and find out,’ said Simon as he got up.

‘Come on. We can go in together!’

Liz stepped forward. Each held an edge of the breach. ‘Now,’ hissed Simon.

Liz tried to count the seconds but time seemed meaningless. She stood in the dark night alongside Simon. Their eyes grew used to the darkness and they could see the crest of the hilltop. No trace of a moon. A few stars. The Station was hardly visible.

‘Come on,’ whispered Simon.

Liz caught his hand. They made silent progress for some twenty paces, their feet getting damper and their eyes sharper. Then they were halted by a second barrier.

‘Barbed wire. I’ve scratched myself,’ said Liz.

Simon fingered the wire. There was a lot of it, new, taut and sharply barbed.

‘Come on,’ he whispered to Liz. ‘There must be a way through.’

‘I’m scared,’ she whispered back.

‘Well, they can’t shoot us,’ muttered Simon. ‘There isn’t a war on.’ He halted suddenly. ‘The wire’s been cut. Let’s get through.’

Liz crowded forward and they slipped through the narrow gap.

‘Someone’s coming!’

They crept downhill and crouched fearfully behind a small outcrop of rocks.

A tall man in hat and overcoat was silhouetted against the sky. Three men followed him through the hole in the wire. All stood silent and alert, listening.

The leader murmured a quiet word and they slipped off their overcoats. One piled the folded clothes by the rocks. From their

outline Simon guessed equipment was strapped to their bodies. Number one spoke softly: 'Folgen. Passen Sie auf.'

Liz closed a tight, damp hand on Simon's as the four men moved towards the blacked-out Station buildings.

It was a long time before they dared exchange a word. Liz was shivering.

'Who were they? What were they doing?'

'The front man spoke German,' Simon whispered back. 'Liz, let's get out of here. I think we should tell the police. Come on.'

He pulled her hand and turned back towards the cut wire.

A young seaman was standing by it. They could just see from his outline that he wore an out-of-date steel helmet and carried a rifle with a long bayonet fixed to it. It pointed cruelly towards them.

'We'll tell the police about it, sonny,' he rapped out. They stood considering him silently.

'I'm taking you two in. Any more of you about? Come on now, sharpish. Who's with you?'

'No one,' answered Simon. 'We came in alone. Found the gap and...'

'A likely tale,' the sailor growled. 'Come on, get down to the Orderly room. And no tricks. I've got one up the spout in this.' He tapped his rifle. The children looked wonderingly at him.

They turned and walked towards the Station.

IT WAS six o'clock by the time Traynor had arrived at St Oswald. He found the village hardly changed in thirty years. A new garage, a new grocer's shop, post-office done up and trendy posters all over the church notice board. He swung the car into the wide drive-in through the middle of The Bull and cut into the yard at the back. In one corner stood a gipsy caravan, bright and colourful in the evening sun. He parked well away from it.

He had to search through the bars before he found the landlord in a tiny snug next to the public.

'Mr Bradley,' he said quietly to the small, middle-aged man. Bradley turned towards Traynor and looked at him blankly.

'Yes?' he said, then paused. 'You'll be Mr Traynor perhaps. Commander Traynor, wasn't it?'

'It was. You've a good memory, Mr Bradley. I'll have a gin and tonic before I take my things up.'

'I'll see to that, Commander. If you give me the car keys the lad can move them up.'

'The keys are in the car, old man—a white Cortina—and not so much of the Commander. That was a long time ago.' A sharp voice

penetrated from the public bar. 'That right you seen Sarah up the Ministry field, Arthur?'

'I did, I did. There one minute she was, gone the next, I tell you.'

'What was you doing up that field anyway, Arthur?'

'Nowt I shouldn't be, Tom Ferris. I'd come from fence posting out at Mr Harrison's place. It were midday and I got out of the sun for a bite and a nap.'

'A sup and a snore more like, Arthur,' said Tom.

'Don't you try to make me out daft, Tom Ferris. I say I seen her. I seen her vanish.'

'Right enough, Arthur. But for all that I never knew you take anything but good ale for your lunch.'

There was laughter and Tom went on: 'Arthur, use your block. If t'were so, she disappeared like you say—where is she disappeared to?'

Arthur, it seemed, was reduced to silence, then Bradley spoke:

'Police say the poor soft kid must have wandered up Totleigh Hill way where those potholes are. That sounds more likely to me!'

'What about that handkerchief I brought her mother? What about that, then?' Arthur had produced his final trump.

'Nobody could swear it was hers, could they, Arthur?' Bradley said. 'There must be a million like it. Besides, what would a kid like her go into that spooky Ministry field for?'

Tom Ferris cackled with laughter and burst out, 'That's it, Arthur. You seen a spook. A ghost, lad...'

Traynor put down his empty glass, nodded at Bradley and left the snug. As he entered the shadowy hall he saw the brilliant colours of a caravan framed in the open back door. Something more than curiosity made him turn towards it. He walked across the yard and circled the old vehicle which he found charming yet surprising. From

inside it came the sounds of someone tinkering with metal and he went to the door. The clonking noises were being made by a middle-aged man fitting a stove together. 'Evening,' said Traynor.

'Hello,' replied the handyman.

'I've just been admiring your remarkable vehicle,' said Traynor. 'Straight out of musical comedy, isn't it?'

The handyman laughed. 'More comedy than music so far, he said. 'You should have seen us trying to catch the pony yesterday.'

'You're not planning to take it on the road?' asked Traynor.

'I am. We're off tomorrow or next day. Come in and look round. It's a real museum piece.' He held out a hand and pulled Traynor up. 'My name's Frank Skinner.'

Traynor tried to conceal his sense of shock. 'And mine's Traynor,' he said slowly. He saw a man with a kindly but rather bemused expression. A trace of scar tissue marked his forehead. He looked round. 'How many can you sleep in here?'

'Four at a pinch,' answered Skinner. 'Two adults and two kids. But we carry a tent as well for the hot nights.' He was fitting the stove together and connecting it to the gas cylinder below. He tried each tap, lighting the burners in turn. 'Well, that should work now. My wife can't wait to get out on the road.'

'She likes caravanning, then,' asked Traynor.

'Not much. But she likes St Oswald less. I was here in the war before I was invalided out of the service. She thinks I'm a bit morbid coming back after thirty years. My daughter Liz doesn't like it either, so I suppose we'd better get on the open road while the weather holds.'

'You were at the Naval Station, weren't you?' said Traynor.

'That's right.'

'Have you been up there since you came?'

‘I simply haven’t had a moment to spare.’

Frank Skinner looked hard at Traynor. A desperate expression of concern had come into his eyes.

‘I’ll tell you this much,’ he suddenly burst out. ‘I would much rather stay here in St Oswald. I’ve been wanting to come back for years. Years and years.’ He turned abruptly towards the stove and began the routine of testing the burners for a second time.

‘St Oswald must have made a deep impression on you,’ Traynor said.

Skinner continued to fiddle with the gas taps and matches. ‘I can’t remember a blind thing about it,’ he said simply, in a defeated voice. ‘I’ve tried. I can recall being posted to the Station as a rating. The next thing I remember is being a patient in a hospital outside Pompey with a lot of nut-cases. They thought I was trying to work my ticket. That was in ’42. Why I went to hospital—what happened—it’s all a blank. A complete, ruddy blank.’ Skinner sighed.

Traynor, looking at him, saw his forehead beaded with sweat. ‘It’s hot in here,’ he said quietly. ‘Turn off the gas.’ He stood up. ‘I must go and get settled in,’ he said and turned to the door.

A boy and girl were looking in, smiling. ‘Daddy,’ said the girl. ‘Simon and I are going for a walk.’

Skinner smiled back at them. ‘Don’t be late back. Supper’s at seven. Before you rush off I’d like you to meet Mr Traynor who’s just arrived. My daughter Liz, and Simon Randall, Mr Traynor.’

‘Hello.’ They smiled and nodded at one another. Then they were gone in a rush through the drive-in.

Traynor was surprised when he reached the Naval Station. He had been sure it was farther away than a three-minute drive. He swung

his car into the gateway and parked. No guard detail to open the gate for him now. He climbed it and set off towards the sheds. A shambles. Wind bent the saplings that had grown among the buildings and fluttered the few rags of loose insulation that remained. Metal sheets scraped delicately together. In his memory he saw it once again as it had been in 1940, new, clean and camouflaged by a team of Naval specialists in a style which had turned it into the most prominent feature in the landscape. He grinned.

His eye was caught by a patch of trodden grass and among it a spot of colour. A paperback edition of George Borrow's *Lavengro*. 'Caravan reading matter,' he muttered as he read on the fly leaf: 'Simon Randall 1970 from Frank, Jean and Liz.' The book went into his pocket and he strolled on towards the wreck of the Station. The buildings, when he found himself among them, were less decrepit than they looked. Those in the centre of the small complex had been protected by the sheds on the perimeter. He went through a Nissen hut, once the Orderly room, empty now save for an irritable owl preparing for its night hunt. He icked down the door at the end near the Operations room and stood among saplings in a hot, windless enclosure. The owl flew noisily out over his head into the darkening evening.

He ducked. 'I wish to God they'd send some hero to do these jobs. Bloody owls terrify me.' A bank of solid boarding sealed the main door of the Operations block but a window had been knocked out of the research lab. He climbed through, stepping carefully over rotten floorboards and tangles of wire. Lizards fled as he crossed the room. A chart board still hung on the wall. Across it a yellow aerosol had sprayed 'City for the cup'. 'Last year's visitors,' thought Traynor, 'and none since by the look of the place.'

The remaining rooms were depressingly derelict. His own old office at the end contained a broken chair. He lifted up some loose floorboards. Below was a rough surface of tar and gravel.

‘Useless,’ he muttered and moved on. In half an hour he had searched the Station’s ruins with the meticulous care of a scientist. His last visit had been a long time ago. He had been here in 1947 to seek an answer to a vital question. But it left the question unanswered. He withdrew to higher ground for a check of the area and then plodded off up the hill to find his car.

He patted the book in his pocket. ‘Mustn’t forget to give this to young Randall,’ he thought to himself.

SIMON AND LIZ stumbled in the dark towards an isolated hut. A sharp challenge came from a pile of sandbags.

‘Halt, who goes there?’

The sailor behind them growled amiably.

‘It’s only me, Phippsy, with a couple more Nazi generals.’

The guard waved them on towards a blacked-out door and turned away.

Inside the guardroom a Petty Officer sat behind a desk. He listened in silence to the sailor’s account of his capture of the two children, and then dismissed him. Liz and Simon watched apprehensively as he went, then turned towards the Petty Officer who examined them, still in silence, until Liz felt so stupid she wanted to cry and Simon began to look about for a quick escape route. The Petty Officer reached for a few sheets of paper and picked up a pencil. Questions began. Names, addresses, schools, parents, what they were doing in St Oswald, what time they got into the Station, where the wire-cutters were. The Germans.

Total confusion made them all talk at once until the Petty Officer ripped up the three sheets of paper he had covered so far.

'We'll start again,' he said. 'Right. You first,' he jabbed the pencil at Simon.

But ten minutes later they were all shouting at one another.

They started a third time.

'Do you always have your summer holidays in May?' asked the Petty Officer.

'No, in August,' said Liz.

'But this is May.'

'If it was May we'd still be at school in London.'

'The London schools are closed.'

'Of course they're closed. It's summer holidays, isn't it?'

The Petty Officer was running his hands madly through his hair.

'When,' he asked, 'did you leave St Oswald?'

'About half past six,' answered Liz. 'And we'd like to go back soon please because supper's at seven and I said we wouldn't be late.'

The Petty Officer looked at his watch. 'I make it eleven twenty-five.'

Silence fell in the little room. Simon exchanged a forlorn look with Liz. The Petty Officer shuffled his papers and began to write again. About twenty minutes later their sailor came in with three enamel mugs.

'Brought you some char, chief,' he said, 'and some for the kids.'

'Thanks. We need it.' The Petty Officer looked defeated, Simon had withdrawn into himself utterly and Liz was near to tears. 'Take this report over to the CO. I'll hang on to these kids in case he wants to see them.'

The sailor was back in ten minutes. 'Wants to see them now.'

'All yours,' said the Petty Officer with relief as Liz and Simon followed their escort.

They passed through a group of sheds. Even in the dark Simon could see that this was very like the Naval Station he had looked down at in the afternoon. The path took them down past four concrete blocks supporting a trellis of tapering steelwork crowned by what might have been a radar scanner. Against the sombre sky the soft outline was dim but both place and equipment seemed oddly out of date. A guard let them through a roughly-textured blackout curtain into the main block. A dim passageway ran the length of the building.

‘Wait here.’ The sailor knocked on a door and then entered.

‘Simon, where are we?’

‘Dunno.’ Simon was edging towards a half-open door through which light flooded. She tiptoed after him. Three technicians were working at the end of a large room.

Nearer, an older man in a white coat crouched over boxes and controls on the front of a green metal box.

‘Yes, yes. That’s more like it, Alice,’ said the man. ‘Now increase range. More and a little more. What is it now?’ ‘Twenty miles,’ said the woman.

‘Then we ought to be getting a better response than this, blast it.’

He leant sideways to adjust a control and disclosed a small, dark glass screen. A line of flickering light appeared on it with a tall peak at one end.

‘Radar,’ murmured Simon.

‘What?’

Simon turned and whispered. ‘It’s radar they’re working on.’

A door opened and the sailor reappeared.

‘Come on, you two,’ he said. ‘The Commander will see you now.’

Able Seaman Phipps leant across the bank of sandbags that screened the guardroom door. His rifle lay below his folded arms.

‘Bloody kids,’ he muttered. ‘Running a ruddy nursery here.’

He yawned, looked at his watch and put out his hand to pick up his rifle. They never made contact. Phippsy collapsed gently to the ground. Two German raiders picked him up and carried him towards a dark shed on the edge of the Station.

The Commander’s office was a working room: charts and graphs pinned to the walls; sheets of duplicated orders and schedules accumulating in a thick mass on a green pin board; electronic equipment on a couple of trestle tables. The Commander was crouched over his desk reading the Petty Officer’s report.

He sat up abruptly and looked at the children.

‘Mr Traynor,’ squeaked Liz.

Younger, more hair, less lined but certainly the man they had seen that evening in the caravan.

‘What did you say?’ The man was angrily surprised.

‘You’re Mr Traynor,’ stammered Simon. ‘We’ve just been introduced at The Bull.’

For a few seconds they exchanged a long, blank stare.

‘I have never set eyes on either of you. How do you know my name. Who are you?’

‘We’ve just left you with Liz’s father, Mr Traynor,’ Simon protested, frightened by this angry man.

‘What the devil are you talking about, boy? I know nothing about either of you. And *you* cut that hole in the wire—you and this girl.’

‘No we didn’t.’

‘Guard?’ The Commander turned to the escort.

‘They were right beside it, sir,’ he replied, looking unhappily at Liz who had burst into tears.

‘We couldn’t help it, sir,’ Simon said. ‘We fell through the first time. You see, sir... it was light one minute and dark the next...

‘Sonny, *I’m* the one who’s in the dark,’ the Commander growled at him.

‘It must have been the other people that cut the wire, sir.’

‘What other people?’

‘The ones who speak German.’

‘German?’ The Commander gazed in amazement at Simon and then burst out laughing.

‘What a turn you two are. We’re in the middle of a full-scale war at a secret establishment, we have coastal defences from north to south and you tell me there are people here speaking German. What do you do for an encore?’

Simon looked miserably at Liz. The Commander stood up.

‘We’ll have to keep you under guard until we can hand you over to the police and inform your parents.’ He turned to the sailor. ‘Get them some cocoa and a sandwich. I’ll be in the Operations room.’

Liz felt the sailor take her arm and guide her to a chair.

‘There,’ he said quietly as she sat down. ‘No need to take on so. You’ll be taken home as soon as we can find your parents.’

‘But,’ Liz asked, ‘this Commander—why doesn’t he know he’s Mr Traynor from the inn?’

‘He’s Mr Traynor all right—Commander Traynor to you—and he goes to The Bull all right. Was down there for lunch today.’

‘Well, then, why doesn’t he know us?’

‘He’s not the only one,’ the sailor answered. ‘We’ve been on the blower to the landlord and he doesn’t know anything about you either.’

‘Old Bradley?’

‘That’s him. Where are you really from, kids?’ the sailor asked as if it were somehow a secret that could be shared between able seamen and children but not between officers and children. Liz looked at him with big eyes. Simon tried to explain.

‘We’re from London and we really are staying at The Bull.’ He was so emphatic about it that the sailor shrugged and turned towards Liz again.

‘What’s your name, anyway?’ he asked.

‘Liz,’ she said. ‘Liz Skinner.’

‘You don’t say.’ He grinned. ‘My name’s Skinner too. Frank Skinner.’

‘Frank!’ Liz said, her eyes even bigger.

‘That’s right. We’ll have to stick together, us Skinners will. You and I. Look, I’ll go and fix you some cocoa and a cheese roll.’

‘But—but—’ Liz stammered as he moved towards the door. ‘Wait a minute...’

‘Don’t take on so, Liz,’ said the sailor. ‘I’ll be back in a jiffy with supper. You’ll be all right here.’

The door closed behind him and Liz turned to Simon who was frowning at her.

‘Simon! Simon, he said his name is Frank Skinner. You heard! That’s Daddy’s name.’

‘SIMON,’ Liz said. ‘Is it really eleven twenty-five?’

‘If it is, they’ll be looking for us everywhere,’ Simon answered. ‘Probably started a search.’

‘Well, why haven’t they found us? It’s nearly midnight and...’ Her voice trailed off.

‘Maybe time is different once you get through that hole in the wall.’

‘It can’t be different,’ Liz protested.

‘I don’t see why not,’ Simon answered. ‘Like a clock that goes slower than another. Or faster...’ He sat looking worriedly at the papers pinned above the Commander’s desk.

‘Well, I wish they’d come and get us,’ Liz grumbled. ‘I’m starving and I bet Mum is going up the wall.’

‘You can be Mum.’ It was their sailor backing into the room with a tray in his hands. Jug of cocoa, mugs, cheese rolls, pickles.

‘Come on, you kids. Grub’s up.’ He put it on the Commander’s desk and waved to Liz.

‘Go on, Liz, do your stuff.’ He grinned at her.

Liz poured out the cocoa and handed round the food. ‘Your name,’ she said. ‘Is it really Frank Skinner?’

‘Right.’

‘I don’t believe it. It can’t be.’

‘What’s this about, girl? What me to phone me mum?’

‘It’s so weird. I mean, if you’re really Frank Skinner and this is the old Naval Station...’

‘Old? Why old? The paint’s still fresh on it.’

Simon swallowed the last of a cheese roll and leant forward.

‘But it is the Naval Station. The one on the hill outside St Oswald?’

‘You know too much, my boy. But you could be right. What I’d like to know is where you both belong. Why don’t you tell the truth? We won’t do you any harm.’

Liz and Simon stared at him silently, trying to find words that would explain their predicament.

‘Come on,’ Frank turned from them sharply. ‘I’ll show you the Recreation room.’

‘Wait a minute,’ begged Liz, ‘just a minute and I’ll try to explain! We’ve come from...’

‘Look,’ said the sailor patiently. ‘You barge into a classified establishment and tell us a tale about a crowd of helpful Germans who cut the wire for you. It’s not reasonable, is it? Come on, kids, I’m to put you in the Recreation room until the top brass has found your mums and dads.’

‘You won’t find our parents,’ said Simon harshly.

‘You’re not like that other kid in there, are you?’ The sailor was losing patience. ‘The one who came in this afternoon?’

‘What other kid?’ Liz demanded.

‘You’ll soon see. You know it isn’t surprising that the Commander does his nut. You village children have no sense. There’s a war on, you know.’ He nodded towards the door and Simon went into the

corridor. Liz followed but as she passed the sailor she stopped close in front of him and smiled.

‘Where were you born?’ she asked.

‘Rugby,’ he answered. ‘Want to see my pay book?’

‘No. I just wondered. Was it about 1924?’

‘Not bad. 1923.’

She looked searchingly at him until he began to frown. Her own expression was one of desperate consternation.

‘Yes,’ she said as she moved out to join Simon. ‘Yes. That’s right.’

Recreation rooms are all alike. Scruffy, battered and full of chalk dust. The dartboard covers bore the scores of the previous night’s games. There were posters pinned up and pages torn from picture papers. A small billiard table stood at one end under a cover, next to it cues and a scoring board. Behind the rickety card tables and chairs was an old sofa. A young, moon-faced girl sat staring sadly at them. Her hands were clasped in her lap and from time to time she sniffed and gave a tiny sob.

‘Who’s that?’ asked Liz, and went towards her.

‘What’s the matter?’ she went on, reaching out a hand. ‘Are you...?’

The girl edged away. Simon had come up behind Liz.

‘It’s Sarah. The girl from the village who disappeared.’

‘What’s she doing here?’

‘What are we doing here?’

They looked at one another uncertainly, then Liz glanced back at Sarah. Her helplessness infuriated her.

‘Why,’ she burst out, ‘are you keeping this girl a prisoner? She’s done nothing wrong. She ought to be at home with her mother. She’s upset and scared. It’s not like you.’ She turned furiously on Frank. The sailor’s eyes popped.

‘Not like me?’ His voice had gone up an octave. ‘Look, I joined the Navy to see the world, not to run a kindergarten. This is the other kid we found. I told you about her. I suppose she fell into the Station too.’ He paused for breath. ‘She won’t tell us a thing about herself. Not even lies.’

‘Well, stupid, she can’t, can she?’ Liz was indignant, both for Sarah’s sake and their own.

‘Why not?’

‘She’s not—well, she’s not like us.’

‘You mean you know her?’

‘Sort of,’ said Liz. ‘Anyway, we know about her.’

The sailor heaved a sigh. ‘Thank the Lord for that piece of good news. I’ll tell the Petty Officer we’ve had a signal from the mainland and can get all boarders ashore.’

He moved towards the door.

‘Mr Skinner,’ Liz said.

‘Call me Frank.’

‘Frank?’

‘It’s my name. Maybe you don’t believe me.’

‘Oh yes,’ said Liz. ‘I believe you, Frank,’ and she felt her throat tighten and tears sting her eyes. He came back to her.

‘Don’t you start crying too, Liz. I can’t bear weeping females.’ He reached out and patted her jaw. She smiled back at him.

‘That’s better, Liz,’ he said. ‘That’s my girl.’

Then she really did cry. As he hurried away into the corridor the tears poured down her face.

Simon moved towards her to try and comfort her. Sarah was still sobbing on the sofa and he suddenly felt helpless. He turned away to the window and slipped behind the heavy black curtain that covered it. Outside it was dark and far away a light was blinking

steadily. A prod in his back and then Liz spoke to him through the blanket.

‘You can come out. I’m all right now. That man Frank is my father,’ she said in a level voice. ‘My dad when young.’

‘I know,’ Simon said. ‘He hasn’t changed all that much.’

‘Well, where are we?’

‘*When* are we, is the question, Liz. I make it around midnight early in May 1940.’

‘How do you know? How?’

‘I had a look at the schedules and daily orders pinned up in the CO’s office. There wasn’t one dated later than May the fourth. And look at all these mags.’ He riffled through a pile of ragged weekly papers.

‘Nothing later than 1939. And look at these. Who’s Vera Lynn?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Liz tightly.

‘Well, I do. My dad’s always on about her singing to the troops in World War II.’

‘World War II?’ said Liz. ‘It can’t be true. 1940 was bad enough but World War II—atom bombs!’

‘Liz—for Pete’s sake. We’re at the front end of it. 1939 and ’40—the phoney bit. The atom bombs come at the finish, in Japan 1945.’

‘I still don’t want to stay for it,’ Liz groaned. ‘How did we get into this?’

‘Dunno. But that invisible wall is the dividing line. It has a hole in it that some people can get through. Like us and poor Sarah. On the other side is 1970—on this side it’s...’

‘1940! Simon, what do you think of my dad? I mean this one in here?’

‘He’s all right,’ grudging words came from Simon.

‘All right? He’s fantastic.’

‘It’s the uniform I suppose,’ Simon grumbled. ‘Anyway,’ he added, ‘he’s not your father—yet.’

HERR KAPITAN GOTTFRIED looked at his watch, reached out towards Graz and touched his arm. Three deliberate pressures.

They had been lucky. Apart from the main block the Naval Station was under the control of his small unit. No alarm, no shots, and the sailors who had provided so ineffectual a guard lay gagged and bound in their billets. Graz reached for his neighbour and passed the signal. There was a slight stir as the men drew pistols. They grouped themselves round Gottfried.

‘Beeilen Sie sich. Machen Sie nichts anderes und widmen Sie sich ausschliesslich meinem Befehl. Seid vorsichtig,’[‡] he said.

[‡] *Hurry up. Do nothing else and devote yourself exclusively to my orders. Be careful.*

When Commander Traynor entered the Operations room the five people in it were bent over their work. Fordyce looked up briefly.

‘Be with you in a moment, Commander,’ he said. ‘We’re having saturation trouble.’

The Commander strolled towards a door beyond the benches. A cardboard sheet pinned on it read ‘admittance reserved to officer

commanding'. When Fordyce joined him both men went through and the lock clicked shut behind them.

Graz opened the door of the main block and stepped into a box blackout, Gottfried beside him.

Graz pulled aside the cloth and peered into the corridor. It was empty. The light dazzled him.

'Moment,' he whispered, signalled the raiders through and drew the curtain aside. They all stared ahead until their eyes accommodated. Like black cats they passed down the corridor. Gottfried, covered by Graz, opened the Commander's office.

'No one,' he muttered. He beckoned the men and moved cautiously to the Operations room, slowly turned the handle and grinned back over his shoulder.

A woman and three men were bent over the benches working at apparatus and notebooks. The woman looked up and screamed. The men stood.

'Don't move, please,' Gottfried said. 'Absolutely still.' The pistols emphasized his orders. The door beyond the benches opened quickly and Fordyce stepped out. He hesitated an instant and then flung himself to his desk. Graz shot. Just once. Fordyce fell, thrown by the force of the heavy bullet. He slid to the floor as Alice sprang towards him.

'Dr Fordyce,' she screamed.

The raiders moved forward and Graz raised his pistol.

'No,' barked Gottfried. 'I warned you not to shoot. Why, you damn fool. Why did you shoot?'

As Fordyce had moved, the Commander, still in the shadows behind him, fell to his knees. With luck, he thought, I may get out

behind the bank of filing cabinets. He grabbed the notice and ripped it off, pulling the door to. Crouching, he made it, to his amazement, to the corridor. He saw Frank Skinner and bundled him into his office.

‘Sir, I thought I heard a shot,’ Frank said.

‘You did. Those kids were right. There’s a mob of Germans in the Operations room.’

He riffled through a bundle of files, picked out a thin packet of papers and snapped at Frank.

‘The skirting board slides along and there’s a space behind it. Let’s get this lot lost.’

The papers hidden, he spoke intently. ‘Skinner. In the room off the Operations room—here’s the key—there’s a secret panel in the rear wall. Switch is above the notice-board—very tiny. The equipment there *must* be dismantled. Must—at all costs, Skinner. I’ll be under close watch in seconds from now. You stand a better chance. God knows what’s become of the rest...’

The door was kicked open. The Commander reached for a drawer in his desk. A Luger barked and he snatched back his hand, splattered with splintered glass and wood chips. Little rills of blood appeared and dripped on the floor.

‘Herr Kapitan,’ shouted the raiders. ‘Der Kommandant.’ Gottfried came running.

‘Warum haben Sie auf diesen Offizier geschossen?’[‡] he growled. The soldier edged round the desk warily and opened the drawer. A Webley-45 lay inside. He passed it over to Gottfried who broke it to shake out the bullets. But it had not been loaded.

[‡] *Why did you shoot that officer?*

‘Dumkopf,’ he snapped, but it was not clear whether he meant his man or the Commander.

‘Have you a field dressing?’ he asked.

A little nervously Frank bound up the Commander’s hand after taking out a few splinters. The soldier left after a brief search for weapons. ‘Souvenir,’ he said as he took the Webley, grinning at Gottfried who stared coldly back.

‘So,’ he said to the Commander. ‘Is this more comfortable for you?’ Both men were sitting on opposite sides of the shattered desk. Frank stood back, making himself as inconspicuous as possible. ‘How,’ he kept thinking to himself, ‘do I get into that small back room?’

The Commander examined his hand. ‘It was hardly necessary,’ he said.

‘Your pistol might have been loaded, Commander Traynor,’ Gottfried said.

‘How the devil do you know my name?’

‘Let me introduce myself. I am Kapitan Helmut Gottfried of the Luftwaffe. I deeply regret the death of a member of your staff.’

‘Deeply regret?’ countered the Commander.

‘I have not come here to kill or destroy, Commander. I came to carry out a duty assigned to me. Give me your promise to cooperate and there will be no more incidents. We will be gone in a few hours.’

‘You’re a cool one. Good with the English too.’

‘I was at Cambridge in the early thirties.’

‘What did you read?’

‘Physics—with Blackett.’

The Commander looked blankly across the desk. ‘A real problem,’ he thought.

‘May I have your promise of cooperation?’

‘Not so fast, Kapitan. You’ve taken over an establishment where I’m in command. Whatever your reasons I find myself obliged to

resent that.'

Gottfried drew himself up and said primly: 'As you wish. Then I must inform you that your staff will be placed under close arrest.'

The Commander picked up a book and swept the broken glass from the top of his desk. It fell clattering to the carpet around Frank's feet. He leant forward, looking hard into Gottfried's eyes.

'Let's drop the officers and gentlemen stuff,' he said quietly. 'Tell me what it's all about.'

'I'm sorry?' Gottfried was puzzled.

'Are you sure you've come to the right place? We're very small beer here in the grand scheme—just a maintenance and records depot.'

'No. A research centre, Commander. Please don't shake your head like that. We have excellent information. And it is the research that interests me.'

'I'd like to know where you get your excellent information.'

Gottfried stood up and waved his Luger towards the door.

'If you please, Commander.'

All three moved out.

'And I'd like to know who helped you to reach a village over twenty miles from the coast.'

'I think it will be better, Commander,' said Gottfried coldly, 'if we try to preserve what you call the officers and gentlemen stuff.' As they entered the Operations room they heard Graz shouting.

'Willage? Willage? Was heisst das? Willage.'

'We come from it. Kleine dorf[‡].' Simon was shouting back. 'Wir haben nix to do with this Naval Station.'

[‡] *Small village*

'Commander,' said Gottfried. 'Who is this boy? And these girls?' Sarah was crouching tearfully against a worried Liz.

The Commander shrugged. 'You must believe me, Gottfried, if I tell you that we simply don't know. They got in here as mysteriously as you did.'

'Impossible,' muttered Gottfried as he moved towards the children and gestured Graz away.

'What are your names, please?'

'Simon Randall.'

'Liz Skinner—and this is Sarah.'

'Can't she talk?'

'She's too upset. Please don't be hard on her.'

'Who said anything about being hard on you? Where did the soldiers find you?'

'In the Recreation room.'

'So. Graz, send a guard for these prisoners.' He waved towards Alice and the three technicians.

'See that they are secured in the billets. Take the children and the Commander back to the Recreation room and stay with them.'

He looked around as the technicians left. 'You,' he said. 'What's your name?'

'Skinner, sir.'

'Like the little girl. A relative?'

'No, sir.'

'Is this so?' Gottfried asked Liz, watching her steadily.

'That's right. He's never seen me before in his life.'

'All right, Skinner, my men want a snack. You will get us food and drink.'

Frank looked uncomfortable at this and began: 'Well, sir...'

'Skinner,' the Commander said. 'We don't have much choice. See what you can knock up for the guests. You've got the key to the supply cupboard.'

‘Thank you, Commander,’ said Gottfried, ‘and now you will retire to the Recreation room. Graz, detail a man as guard with me. I may be a little preoccupied with my investigation.’

TRAYNOR, back from his fruitless search at the Station, had come softly into the lounge and was about to leave when he noticed a youngish woman asleep before the dying fire. She woke quickly.

‘I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to wake you,’ he said.

‘I’m glad you did. I was having a nightmare.’ She passed her hands over her face as if to wipe it away.

‘I hope it’s gone?’

‘Yes. Well almost,’ she sighed. ‘My mind was full of radio signals and atmospherics and bits of strange talk. Nothing much really but I feel terribly scared.’

‘What’s the time?’ She stood up. ‘My husband is putting our caravan in order. I’d better find him.’

‘There wasn’t anyone out there when I came in,’ Traynor said. ‘You must be Mrs Skinner. My name is Traynor and I’ve brought Simon Randall’s book back. I found it near the Naval Station.’

‘That’s kind of you. Yes, I am Jean Skinner. Thanks.’ She took the book and went to the window. The bowlshaped hill with its cluster of ruins had filled with hazy shadow.

‘My nightmare noises haven’t quite gone.’ She turned a puzzled face to Traynor. ‘Do you hear anything? A sort of electronic jangle?’

Traynor shook his head.

'Odd,' she said. 'Are you staying here, Mr Traynor?'

'I'm here for a few days. Pleasant spot.'

'I suppose so. It's pretty but I find it depressing. Frank likes it though. I must go and find him,' she concluded abruptly and left the lounge.

'Well?' Jean Skinner turned abruptly to her husband as he came into the lounge.

'No sign,' he said.

'Don't you think we ought to tell the police?'

'You know what kids are like. They're not really late yet.'

'That village girl disappeared in broad daylight.'

'She's a bit dotty. Gets lost easily.'

'Frank, I'm worried. She was lost by the old Naval Station and that's where that Mr Traynor found Simon's book. Let's go and look for them.'

'It isn't dark yet. We'll wait a bit.'

Jean turned suddenly towards the window and the shadowy ruins of the Station. She pressed her hands to her ears, cried out and fell to her knees.

'Jean, Jean,' Frank murmured as his arms went round her. He picked her up and carried her to their room.

He pulled up a chair at the bedside and watched her strained face. Her lips moved. Whispers at first. Frank bent closer. She began to gasp, tried to sit up.

'...unsere Zeit... unsere Zeit ist vorbei... sobald wir damit...'[‡]

[‡] '*...our time... our time is up... as soon as we have it...*'

The voice was not Jean's though the words came from her lips. Frank leant towards her, surprised and scared. He seized her shoulder, shook her violently. She woke, enormous eyes fixed on the wall behind him.

Her glance strayed vaguely to Frank.

'Liz?' she whispered. 'Where's Liz?'

Frank dodged the question.

'You were talking German in your sleep.'

'I don't speak German.'

'It sounded like German, but not like you.'

'Frank, I'm so scared. Where's Liz?'

'I'm going to look for her now.'

'I'm coming too. She needs me.'

'Jean, it's not that late and, anyway, Simon would look after her. But I'll go and look round. You stay here and rest.'

Frank Skinner, wrapped in thought, wondered where he could best begin to look for Liz and Simon. As he passed the lounge he saw Traynor.

'I say, you haven't seen our two kids, have you?'

'No. But I found Simon's book near the Naval Station. I gave it to your wife. Are they late for supper?'

'Enough to worry us. Don't know their way about this place. Do you know it well?'

'Pretty well.' Traynor examined Skinner calculatingly.

'I was here during the war too,' he said.

'At the Naval Station?'

'Yes.'

‘What went on there?’ Skinner asked, nodding towards the window.

‘We were working on the development of radar. Highly secret. I’m a physicist but work in a specialized field now.’ He paused. ‘I came to St Oswald today because a girl disappeared near the Station.’

‘I heard about her.’

‘Now your daughter and Simon are late back. I think there could be a connexion. But,’ he added as Skinner rose in alarm, ‘they are unlikely to be in grave danger.’

‘Who are you? What do you know about my daughter and Simon?’

Surprise, doubt, disbelief chased across Skinner’s rather amiable face as Traynor replied:

‘I was your Commanding Officer in 1940. Here. At the Station. I ran the place.’

‘My CO,’ Skinner muttered. ‘I remember something now. But not at the Station.’ His face brightened.

‘You came to see me in hospital.’

‘Several times,’ said Traynor.

‘I’ve only vague memories of those days. Was it you got me out of the place?’

‘I helped. It was doing you more harm than good.’

Skinner was grinding a fist into the palm of his other hand, struggling to fit this information into his mind when Jean appeared in the doorway, pale and shaken. Traynor moved swiftly towards her, led her to an armchair and rang for service. Bradley appeared and he said curtly:

‘A brandy and soda for Mrs Skinner.’

When Bradley returned with the drink Jean gratefully sipped from the glass. Traynor, Bradley and her husband stood watching her.

Suddenly in a husky firm voice she said, 'Machen Sie nichts anderes... geben Sie acht...'‡

‡ *'Don't do anything else... be careful...'*

Traynor looked at Skinner who looked bewildered, and then at Bradley. The landlord's face was pallid—terrified. He looked at Traynor.

'Shall I—should we—I mean—the lady's ill. Does she need a doctor?'

'No. No doctors,' Traynor said.

'There's a very good one in the village. Just down the road.'

'No, Bradley! We don't need doctors to solve this mystery.' He had spoken sharply to the landlord who backed away.

'As you say, sir,' he said nervously, and left.

Traynor turned to Skinner.

'Is she often like this?'

'No. Never before, that I remember.'

'But lately?'

'Only since we came to St Oswald. Headaches and bad dreams and dropping into a sort of dozy sleep in the daytime.'

'Does she speak German?'

'Not a word.'

'I don't think you need to worry about the children. Not seriously.'

'What do you mean?'

'I can't explain this simply. You'll have to take a lot on trust. We're in the presence of a set of unknown quantities. First a village girl disappears before the eyes of an only slightly drunk farm labourer. Then two more children fail to return from a short ramble, and one of them has left his book near the place where the first disappearance happened.'

'I don't understand,' Skinner burst out.

Traynor paused.

‘Do you believe that time just passes away?’

‘Time?’

‘Yes, time. That the past is gone, the future not come and all we can know is the present, the moment that is just happening. Now.’

‘What else? That’s how we live, though in my case some of my past has gone from my mind for ever.’

Traynor nodded. ‘Yes. Now listen carefully. A few scientists today are beginning to examine the possibility that in areas where there has been a release of energy, extensive energy—great events, for instance—the past may, somehow or other, persist.’

‘How can it? That’s the maddest thing I ever heard. And what has it to do with Liz and Simon?’

‘You have a close relationship with Liz, don’t you, Skinner? Perhaps closer than is usual between father and daughter. Perhaps because of your lost memories. Isn’t that so?’

Skinner regarded the other man curiously and then turned to his wife. But he could get no support from her. She lay back in the chair, her eyes closed, apparently asleep.

‘I suppose that is so,’ he conceded reluctantly.

‘Has it not occurred to you that by bringing her near events, conflicts in which you were involved and which have affected you all ever since, you may have made it possible for her to relive them?’

Skinner shook his head in disbelief.

‘What events?’

‘In May 1940 a small group of Germans took over the Station. For a period of several hours they were in complete control. We are still uncertain how much the raiders found out about our work.’ He paused. ‘Besides, we have just had curious evidence about Liz and Simon from your wife?’

‘Evidence of what?’

‘That the past is accessible to young and sensitive people. Not to you or I, Skinner. We’re too old and our perceptions are dulled. But for young people...’

‘Are you trying to tell me that my daughter and Simon are back with whatever happened at the Station? Just because my wife speaks a bit of German in her sleep?’

‘And hears electronic noises and jangles while she’s awake. She told me earlier,’ Traynor replied. ‘Believe me, Skinner, we must act delicately. What is happening is too serious for doctors. Or policemen.’

Three minutes later they swept out of The Bull in Traynor’s car.

GRAZ SAT MENACINGLY on a chair he had dragged across to the Recreation room door, coldly watching his prisoners. A callous, professional soldier, thought the Commander, doesn't give a damn that he's just killed a man. He'd do it again. He turned towards the children—Liz turning over old magazines, Simon rolling billiard balls nervously from one hand to the other.

'Want a game?' he said to Simon who looked startled at the idea.

'I—I beg your pardon, sir?' he stammered.

'This one doesn't speak any English, does he?' murmured the Commander.

'No,' said Simon. 'I don't think so.'

Graz stood up inquiringly but sat down scowling as the Commander said 'Game. Spiel.' And began to set up the balls for snooker.

'Listen, Simon Randall,' said the Commander as he drew back his cue and began the game. 'I want the truth. How did you kids get in here?'

Simon leant on his cue. 'We don't know. There was this hole in the fence. We...'

'I don't believe a word—it's your shot—the Germans paid you to cut an entrance.'

'No,' snapped Simon, and miscued.

'Take it again.'

'No.' Simon stood back scowling.

The Commander began again, playing smoothly.

'You see,' he said. 'It's easy if you've got a clear conscience. Come on—tell me the facts. How did these Jerries get in without being spotted?'

'I don't know,' Simon said. 'I tried to tell you we saw Germans and you laughed at us. They appeared just after we fell... I mean after we came through the hole.'

Traynor miscued. It was true he'd laughed at that story. He played three strokes in silence, then failed to sink a ball. 'I'm not really very good at this,' he thought.

'Yours,' he gestured to the table and sat down.

Simon sank two balls. Confidence returned.

'Honestly, Mr Traynor, Liz and I had nothing to do with these Germans coming here. Honestly.'

'Play on. Tell me another thing. Who told you my name?'

'A man at The Bull,' Simon countered evasively. 'It's your turn. It's very difficult to explain it.'

'You've said that before, my boy, but it doesn't help much.' He sank his ball and the blue, then set his ball up and drew back the cue.

Simon leant forward and said quietly, 'They've come to pinch our ideas on radar, haven't they?'

The Commander's cue went across the top of his ball which trickled slowly and aimlessly down the table. Graz laughed.

‘What the hell do you know about radar?’ The Commander glowered at Simon.

‘I saw the equipment in the big room and I know what radar looks like.’

‘Nobody, nobody at all except us and the Ministry top brass knows what we’re working on here. What’s your game? Answer me!’

Their raised voices had brought Graz to his feet and the Commander softened his tone a little.

‘No,’ he said irritably. ‘You can’t take a point for that. You have to hit a red first.’ He indicated the track of the balls. ‘Take the shot again,’ and as Simon replaced his ball, the Commander turned with a grin and shrug to Graz. ‘Kinder,’ he said, dismissing the incident.

In the Operations room Gottfried sat in front of the radar unit trying controls, drawing and writing intently in his notebook. He had dismantled some of the adjacent equipment. A small pile lay at the end of the bench—a multiple tube oscillator, circuits, sheets of figures from the technician’s table. His guard leant against the filing cabinets. Frank had filled the kettle and turned on the gas ring. It was a slow job getting boiling water out of this old thing. He set out cups and cartons of milk and a big enamel coffee jug. He picked up the coffee tin, took off the lid, turned to Gottfried.

‘No coffee,’ he said. ‘Must get some from the stores.’

Gottfried looked up.

‘Coffee? Yes, get some. Have you bread and butter? And that English marmalade?’

Bloody sauce, Frank thought. Poor old Traynor’s Dundee.

‘I think I can find some for you, sir,’ he said. He moved off to the back room.

‘Halt,’ said the guard, raising his pistol.

‘It’s in the CO’s office. He often has breakfast there.’

‘Good. Get it but be quick.’ The Kapitan waved him out and Fritz stood by the door as Frank disappeared for a moment, returning with a white jar of marmalade.

‘That’s the one. Must get some more coffee from the store cupboard.’ Frank indicated the back room door to Fritz.

‘Herr Kapitan?’ asked Fritz, raising his pistol.

‘OK. Er braucht mehr Kaffee.’[‡]

[‡] *‘He needs more coffee.’*

The door was heavy. Armoured, thought Frank, and he let it swing back once he had removed the key. But the room was no bigger than a small kitchen, cluttered with bits of gear and a couple of cupboards. A bench ran along one side below a tool rack. There were heavy insulated cables coming in from above a panel. Maybe not, thought Frank. *Going in.* They *came* in through the ceiling. The air was close and still.

He pressed, then tapped the wall below the cables. It felt solid and heavy. But the switch was behind the noticeboard all right and, when he pressed it, he heard the soft murmur of a servo-mechanism pushing the panel to one side. He was looking into a metal-lined cabinet. The cables ended in heavy-duty sockets. On the cupboard floor a mild steel frame supported a cylinder of blued steel. Frank peered at it and stepped nervously away to one side. It had a muzzle-like aperture facing the room. A sheet of armour plate was bracketed to the opposite wall and on it two rectangular blocks bolted parallel with one another. He could see they were about the same level as the aperture and guessed that they might have held a target.

‘This is it,’ he said to himself.

He reached in and gripped the steel frame. It moved fairly easily and he reached inside it to take the cylinder. Its weight surprised him and, looking closer, he saw it was fixed by simple nuts and bolts to the cross girders of the frame. He turned them with finger and thumb.

‘Wonder if this thing’s lethal,’ he thought, sweating with the closeness of the room and the anxious responsibility of this job. He must somehow disconnect the power and he hadn’t a free hand. The cylinder slipped a little and he gripped it harder. A numb and cold pain grew beneath his skull. He was in the track of the beam.

It was then that the kettle boiled in the Operations room and the guard tapped on the door; then hammered hard.

‘Matrose,’ he shouted. ‘Das Wasser.’[‡]

[‡] *‘Sailor, the water.’*

Frank swayed from side to side. With a tremendous effort he thrust the machine back and fell to his knees, turned the switch and staggered towards the door. The panel closed smartly and in the storm of pain that swept through his head he had enough sense to pick up the coffee tin. The hammering on the door stopped. He slid back the catch and collapsed.

Liz had grown tired of the conversation about snooker and raids and even more tired of the funnies of 1939. She turned to the piano and played a thin note or two. From where she stood she could see a gap in the blackout and went and stood by it. If she leant on it she could look out into the starlight. The cloud cover had thinned. On the path outside the window her father was standing arguing with the real Mr Traynor she had seen at The Bull.

‘Simon,’ she screamed. ‘They’re here. Look. Look. Daddy and Mr Thing who we met.’ He dropped his cue and rushed over. ‘See,’ she shouted.

‘Yes. It’s them.’

Behind them Graz, pistol in hand, had leapt to the window. Liz wasted no words. She tugged Simon’s arm and they belted out and ran down the corridor. They had disappeared by the time Graz reached the main door. Behind him came Gottfried. They heard Liz shouting from round the corner.

‘Daddy! We’re here. Thank goodness you’ve come. It’s been so awful.’

When they turned the corner they saw her standing, fists clasped against her chest. She was screaming.

‘It’s me. It’s me. Daddy. Can’t you see me?’ Simon stood behind her.

Graz stepped towards the children ominously but Gottfried ordered him back.

‘Wait,’ he said. ‘We’ll watch. The children will not run.’

They saw Liz turn to the boy.

‘What’s wrong, Simon? What’s wrong?’ she said.

‘They don’t seem to hear you.’

Gottfried stepped forward.

‘What is the matter with you two children? Explain please.’

‘It’s her father with Mr Traynor. There! Can’t you see? By the window.’

‘Are you mad? There is no one there.’

‘No one there?’ stammered Liz.

‘Not a soul.’

‘Daddy,’ screamed Liz at the top of her voice, and Graz clapped a great flat hand over her mouth.

‘GET HER INSIDE,’ Gottfried snapped, reaching out for Simon. ‘Come, you too. You’re not taking us on some wild ghost chase.’

He pulled him away from Traynor and Mr Skinner who was thumping the air with his fists. ‘It’s nonsense-moonshine,’ he was shouting.

In the Operations room they found Fritz uneasily guarding Liz. Tears poured down her face. Gottfried sank into a chair behind the desk and bent forward, head in hands. Simon had moved next to Liz.

‘What, my extraordinary kinder, the hell are you playing at?’ He glowered at both of them. They looked helplessly back. The truth was beyond comprehension but a version of it might do.

‘You see, sir,’ said Simon. ‘We saw Mr Skinner, that’s Liz’s father, and a man from The Bull outside the window and we rushed out to talk to them.’

‘And,’ cut in Gottfried, ‘what did you say to these visitors in the night?’

‘Well, all we could do was shout it’s us but they didn’t hear us.’

‘Not at all?’ asked the Kapitan.

‘Mr Skinner kept shouting it was moonshine.’

‘Perhaps he was correct,’ growled Gottfried.

He suddenly slapped his hands flat on the desk, and the children and Fritz jumped with surprise. A hard note came into his voice.

‘Now understand. I will have no more of these foolish games. I have important work to complete here and not much time. So nothing must interfere with it.’ He slapped the table again. ‘I hope you understand me well. Go with Fritz into the games room across the corridor.’

The children turned and moved off. Liz found herself looking into the back room. Frank was lying on the floor. With a cry of distress she broke away towards him crying, ‘Frank...’

Gottfried stepped round the desk brushing aside Fritz who had reached for his Luger.

‘What have you done to him?’ Liz looked up at Gottfried accusingly.

‘Nothing,’ he replied quietly. ‘Nothing at all. He looks very sick.’

‘He needs help,’ Liz announced emphatically. ‘Haven’t you got a doctor here?’

‘Doctors? God help us.’ He bent over, turned Frank completely flat on his back and gently felt his forehead where there was a red and sensitive-looking spot. ‘Perhaps he fell. He came in here to get coffee.’

Gottfried picked up the tin and smelled it. He looked round the small room with its work bench and cupboards and piles of metal junk; he opened the wall cupboard; saw it was full of tins of food, cutlery, plates and cups; he looked again at Frank.

‘Fritz, get this man into the games room and put a blanket over him.’

‘Ist er tot?’[‡] asked Fritz in consternation.

[‡] ‘Is he dead?’

‘Nein Dumkopf,’ snapped the Kapitan. ‘A blanket or some overcoats to keep him warm and alive.’ He swung round quickly as he heard a switch click and a soft hum from the radar set. A few angry steps brought him up behind Simon. ‘Who told you to touch that?’ he burst out. ‘Was it Commander Traynor’s orders to you? Speak up now.’

‘Why Commander Traynor?’ muttered Simon.

‘Did he tell you to interfere with it—destroy it? What’s that in your hand?’

Simon held out a piece of loose metal with solder patches and loosely connected leads. It had been lying on the pedestal of the set.

‘You are trying to dismantle it. Answer.’ Gottfried, however, was speaking with less conviction as he examined the loose piece. The set went on producing an oscillating flow of light across its screen. Both Simon and Gottfried examined it coldly.

‘Seen one of these before?’ Gottfried asked a little too slyly.

‘No,’ Simon answered, knowing that he could honestly say he hadn’t. The ones he had seen on RAF field days were as different as Phantoms from Spitfires.

‘But it interests you?’ Gottfried went on.

‘Well, at school we’ve done some experiments like this. It’s sort of radio set and receiver all in one, isn’t it?’

‘At school, eh?’ answered the Kapitan. ‘Your schools in England must be well ahead of ours in Germany.’

He sat looking stonily at Simon who turned aside. Fritz and Liz were helping Frank towards the door.

‘Can I go with Liz, sir?’ he asked, nodding towards the others.

‘No. I think best you should stay and talk to me a little. And Liz will make us some food.’ He called her over. ‘Liz, you will finish the job the sailor was doing. We still need food.’

‘But he’s ill. You did say I could look after him.’

‘All we need is something to keep us going. And your young sailor could do with a hot drink.’

‘But I’m no good at it—no good at all. I can’t even boil an egg.’

‘Better and better. So we will have none of your depressing English boiled eggs. There’s the gas ring over there. Now get along to the kitchen.’

Liz moved off to the food cupboard, wondering desperately how to begin producing a meal when her mind was so full of worries about Frank and the strange appearance of her father and Mr Traynor.

‘If only I could have made them hear me,’ she thought desperately. In the background the Kapitan was saying to Simon:

‘And now I think you must help me in examining this equipment and no doubt you will tell me something of your experiments at school.’

‘I’d like to tell him about my domestic science experiments at my school with old mother pie-face,’ Liz muttered.

The stores cupboard yielded condensed milk and pilchards in tomato sauce, tin openers, pots and some cutlery. Liz piled a few tins on the work bench and examined them one by one.

‘Pilchards and tomato sauce, pilchards and tomato sauce, pilchards and...’ She picked up the tin opener and wrenched at one of the tins with irritation, unable even to make a dent. Across the Operations room she could hear the Kapitan talking to Simon.

‘Now then, we’ll try it again. Come, the transmitter, please, as I have shown you.’

A switch clicked and Liz could see bleeps of light jumping on the screen.

‘Now increase range.’

She saw the screen blur as Simon revolved the tuning dial.

'The signal's lost,' said Simon. He bent round the set to look into it. 'There's a loose terminal in here. Needs a bit of solder.'

'Well, then,' said Gottfried. 'Solder it.'

Simon turned away towards the work bench in the back room but as he went Gottfried raised his voice.

'You find this pretty elementary stuff?'

'What's that, sir?'

'Come now. I suppose in our best German schools we could muddle through to this. But you British seem very advanced.'

'Oh, I wouldn't know about that, sir. I'm just from the village.'

'The village,' Gottfried echoed. 'It must be a remarkable centre. You wouldn't be likely to know anything else that is going on here?'

'Like what, sir?'

'You cannot expect, my boy, that I will believe your Royal Navy has built an inland research centre just to conduct schoolroom experiments.' He paused and then began to go through the drawers of the desk. Simon went on towards the work bench where Liz was making a second assault on the tins.

'Don't you know anything?' he asked. 'Tins are usually opened from the top.'

'I don't want to know,' Liz spat back quietly. 'My father, Frank, whoever he is—look at what's happened to him—and you think I'm going to feed these horrible Germans?'

'We still have to eat. I'm starving. Gimme that tin opener.'

'Here then. My wrists aren't strong enough.'

'It's brains you need for opening tins.'

'If you're so brainy tell me what it meant. Daddy and Mr Traynor turning up like that...'

‘I’m not sure, Liz. But I do know that they really were there and had come up here to look for us.’

‘They were there all right, but we were too, weren’t we? So why couldn’t they see us?’

‘Because we weren’t there as far as they were concerned. You see we’re in 1940 now and they’re in 1970. Because we *really* come from 1970 we could see them but they couldn’t see us back in World War II. The Germans couldn’t see them either.’

‘I don’t think I’ve got the brains for all this,’ Liz groaned. ‘I think I’d better stick to the cookery bit. Not that I’m much good at that. Only I keep being upset about Frank who’s my father before he was my father. What *happened* to him? It’s all so weird.’

‘Whatever happened to him he’ll get better. You know that or you wouldn’t *be* here. What we have to do is to get out of this place.’

‘How?’

‘First the hole in the fence and then through the barrier. You, me and Sarah.’

‘Sarah?’

‘We can’t leave her here even if she’s not very bright. Do you think you can make her understand?’

‘I’ll have to somehow.’

‘You see, Liz, I’m going to be in real trouble if I don’t get out soon.’

‘You? How?’

‘I understand about radar. I mean, I know how it works and how it was developed during the war. Old Gottfried quizzes me about it and I’m scared he’s going to get all I know out of me somehow.’

‘Well, why don’t you tell him? What difference can it make?’

‘Liz, for goodness sake! Don’t you know there’s a war on?’

And Simon left her to her cooking and returned to the radar set.

FRITZ, half-carrying Frank, was let into the Recreation room by Graz. Traynor swung round to the door and felt his hopes drain away at the sight of Frank in such poor shape.

‘Skinner...’ he rapped out as Fritz pushed him away.

‘Er ist krank,’ Fritz said. ‘Sprechen Sie deutsch?’[‡]

[‡] *‘He is sick. Do you speak German?’*

‘Sehr wenig,’^{‡‡} Traynor answered cautiously.

^{‡‡} *‘Very little.’*

‘Vielleicht ist er gefallen. Sehen Sie sich seinen Kopf an.’^{‡‡‡}

^{‡‡‡} *‘Maybe he fell. Look at his head.’*

Traynor examined the wounded skin on Frank’s forehead. He looked at Fritz. ‘Kein Kampf?’^{‡‡‡‡}

^{‡‡‡‡} *‘Not a fight?’*

Fritz shook his head and left.

They put Frank down on the sofa and covered him with a blanket. His breathing was shallow and he showed no sign of regaining consciousness. Traynor sat brooding by his side hoping for some change in his condition. Sarah sat immobile, twisting the hem of her skirt in her fingers. Occasionally she sniffed. A sharp kick on the door ended the silence. Graz drew his Luger and swung open the door. Facing him was Liz with a tray of steaming food and coffee.

‘Food,’ she said. ‘Eat?’

‘Herein,’ grunted Graz and waved Liz into the room with the Luger.

Traynor thoughtfully watched her pass across the room and put the tray down on the billiard table. He walked over and stood beside her. ‘Looks good,’ he said. ‘Do we prisoners of war get grub too?’

‘Oh yes. I suppose so anyway. I’ve cooked up masses of it.’ She even managed a smile.

‘Can you distract the attention of the German guard? Make some diversion. It’s important for young Skinner.’

‘Trust me,’ said Liz. ‘We learn it in Domestic Science.’ She turned towards Graz, plate of steaming pilchards in one hand and coffee mug in the other.

‘Oops, so sorry!’ she cried out. Coffee and fish slipped from her grasp, and the scalding mixture landed in Graz’s lap.

He leapt to his feet, stamping in rage and pain. ‘Dummes Kind!’

‘Here, let me clean you up,’ Liz said. ‘My, aren’t you going to smell something horrid before you get home,’ she went on in a flurry of chatter that provoked Graz even further. Traynor was shaking Frank by the shoulder.

‘Skinner,’ he was saying sharply into Frank’s ear. ‘It’s Commander Traynor. Can you hear me?’

‘Lights... lights... very bright... my head hurts.’ Frank was gasping in a husky whisper.

‘That job I ordered you to do, Skinner. Did you get it done?’

‘Lights...’ muttered Frank and, sighing, relapsed into a coma.

Traynor bent frowning over him, adjusted his blankets and felt his forehead with the back of his hand. Then, sensing another presence near, he looked up and saw Gottfried watching him.

‘Is he at all better?’ he asked.

‘For a moment he spoke a word or two but it didn’t make much sense,’ replied Traynor.

‘Like many other things here, Commander,’ Gottfried said. ‘We found him on the floor. I thought perhaps he has had a blackout and is now concussed.’

‘A blackout?’ said Traynor musingly. ‘I suppose it’s possible though he’s very young for that.’

‘Well, Commander, however it came about we must eat. And I would like you to do me the honour of taking dinner with me.’

Traynor held back his amusement at this pompous invitation.

‘As you wish, Herr Kapitan,’ he answered. ‘And since you’re inviting me to food I’ll provide the drinks. There’s a bottle or two of claret in my locker.’

‘After you, Herr Commander,’ said Gottfried, standing aside for Traynor to pass. He turned to Liz. ‘You will serve us as soon as possible. Perhaps you can persuade also your sailor friend to drink a little coffee?’

A furious Liz stormed back into the Operations room to find Simon spooning up pilchards.

‘That’s the Admiral’s pilchards you’re scoffing, Simon Randall. You’ll have to open another tin for me and you.’

‘Listen, Liz,’ Simon cut in. ‘I’ve got a plan to make a getaway. Now just listen and don’t argue. Fritz was called out to take a signal and he’ll be back in a second.’

GOTTFRIED RAISED his glass against the light and looked through the ruby red wine.

‘Your British Navy always manages a few comforts, however simple its life may become.’

Traynor’s glass was cupped in both hands and he looked musingly into its shadowed depth.

‘As you say, we manage, Kapitan,’ he answered. ‘Not a bad wine this one. You wouldn’t have done better if you’d raided Claridges.’

‘Or the Hotel Bristol in Berlin?’

Traynor smiled. ‘Let’s be serious, Gottfried. You’re a hunter without a quarry and you’re using your charm and politeness to get something out of me. You might as well be honest and say straight out what you want and then accept the fact that you won’t get it.’ Traynor gazed speculatively at his opponent.

‘So,’ answered Gottfried, ‘We are at war and there is no way to communicate. A misfortune.’ He pushed back his chair and paced round the room, as if weighing in his mind whether or not to talk. He turned and leant across the desk.

‘It was a surprise to me, Commander Charles Traynor of the Royal Navy, when I learnt you were in charge of the Station here at

St Oswald. I remember you well for your papers on physics in the International Science Review in the late thirties. Particularly one in 1937. May I remind you? It was on the possibility of radio signals from beyond the atmosphere. I wrote querying three points...'

'You're Gottfried,' burst out Traynor. 'Helmut K Gottfried of Heidelberg University. Faculty of Physics. I'll be damned.' He had leapt to his feet looking in a kind of delighted amazement at his opponent. 'And your queries, the first two, proved valid. As a result I was able to make...'

The two men stood silently examining one another. 'Exactly,' said Gottfried. 'We're at war. And so I won't easily get what I want from you, Commander. At least, not as a Naval Officer. But as scientist to scientist there are some very interesting questions. First,' his voice became pleading, 'first, what about that boy?'

Traynor relaxed.

'The boy,' he said, 'and the two girls are your pigeon. They helped you to get in through the wire.'

'No.' Gottfried's denial carried conviction, and Traynor felt he must reconsider the question of the children.

Gottfried went on.

'We Germans have not yet stooped to using children in a dangerous enterprise of this kind. But the boy, Commander, is remarkably knowledgeable.'

'He may well be,' Traynor answered. 'But I don't know who he is, where he came from, nor how he came by his extraordinary knowledge.'

'So. Perhaps I can persuade him to tell us. Now, my second question.'

He was interrupted by a sharp rap on the door. He called 'Herein' and Fritz entered and handed him a slip of paper.

'I may have less time here than I had hoped.' He dismissed Fritz and moved closer to Traynor.

'Commander, I must tell you. The radio-location sets in your Operations room are quite impressive but nobody will convince me or the Abwehr[‡] that Charles Traynor's talents are being wasted on just that. You must tell me, please... what are you doing here in this dreary little village?'

[‡] *German military intelligence*

'The East Coast is very agreeable in the early summer,' Traynor replied.

'You may change your mind about that before we leave,' returned the Kapitan as he got to his feet. 'Come. I have a little more work to do before we talk again.' And he stood back politely as Traynor passed into the corridor.

Gottfried came slowly and irritably into the Operations room. Liz looked up from washing the greasy dishes. She shook her fingers dry and wrinkled up her nose. Not her idea of a job. Fritz came to attention and then drifted away as Gottfried brushed him aside. Simon was finishing a neat solder job on the radar set. Gottfried looked across his shoulder.

'No more fading now?' he asked.

'Not any more,' said Simon. 'What's it for?' he asked and regretted his question as Gottfried answered him tartly: 'As if you didn't know, my boy.'

'Sir,' said Simon abruptly. 'There's something Liz and I think you ought to be told.'

Liz approached them slowly.

'And what,' asked Gottfried casually, 'should I be told?'

‘Well, sir, just before you arrived we were outside in the field.’

‘I suppose you must have been—and how did you get there?’

‘We climbed in through a hole in the fence.’

‘You what?’

Liz burst in. ‘We did. There was a hole in the wire and we got through it and then this sailor caught us. We had a horrid time and they put us into that room with Sarah.’

‘Sarah,’ burst out Gottfried. ‘Is that the other girl—the quiet one?’

‘That’s right,’ Liz ran on. ‘She doesn’t talk much but she told us when she came in hours ago she saw some sailors burying a machine near the rocks by that hole.’

‘A machine?’ Gottfried was alert but disbelieving. ‘What kind of machine?’

‘Sir,’ said Simon. ‘Sarah is what we call not very bright, sir. She said it was like a Meccano set, only bigger.’

‘Is this true?’ the Kapitan growled. ‘Or some more ghosts?’

‘I think it must be true. sir. Sarah’s too stupid to make it up,’

‘And why, my young ones, do you tell me this?’

‘We thought you should know,’ Liz said. ‘You see they’ve been horrid to us since they caught us and you’re much better. Down in the village we don’t like the Station people much—they’re...’

‘Weird. And they push us around.’

‘Down in your village they seem to me even more weird.’ Gottfried was half convinced towards action.

‘You don’t behave like children out of any village in the world I know about. You especially, my boy. Tell me the truth at last. What are you doing in this place? The real truth.’

Simon plucked up courage to look the Kapitan in the eye and say slowly:

‘Nothing. We were playing and happened to get in here and the sailors took us prisoners.’

‘Well,’ sighed Gottfried. ‘Let us now go and dig up the Meccano set. Where is the place?’

‘Only Sarah knows,’ said Liz. ‘We’ll have to take her there.’

‘We’ll get her on our way,’ said Gottfried. ‘And I hope you two understand that my time here is short and I’m going to be very angry if anyone wastes it. Come. And you too, Fritz. See if you can find a spade.’

In the Recreation room Traynor looked up as Gottfried, Fritz and the children entered. Liz went over to Sarah and put an arm round her. ‘Come on, Sarah,’ she said quietly. ‘We’re going for a walk.’

Sarah drew herself away and sniffed.

‘You want to go home to your mum, don’t you?’ Liz went on.

‘Mum?’ said Sarah with more sniffs.

‘Yes, mum. She’s got some sweets for you.’

Sarah showed more interest.

Traynor came forward.

‘What’s going on?’ he demanded.

‘I have to question this child,’ the Kapitan answered.

‘Gottfried,’ Traynor insisted. ‘I must remind you that these children are under my authority. If anything should happen to them...’

Gottfried began to shout. ‘How often must I tell you, Commander, that I am not here to harm anyone. For men like us, war is not an opportunity to maim and kill. And especially not children...’

Under this screen an insistent Liz had coaxed Sarah out of her chair. ‘You’ll just have to do what we say and then you can get back

to your mum. You do understand, don't you, Sarah?'

The simple child looked with half a smile at Liz and nodded. They were on their way. Once in the dark both Liz and Simon lost their sense of direction. But Fritz strode confidently towards the perimeter and as their eyesight grew used to the dark they saw the fence and then the rocks behind which they had hidden.

Fritz drove the light shovel he had found among tools in the guardroom into the ground and looked to Gottfried, like a terrier on a rat hunt.

The Kapitan turned to Sarah. 'Is this the place?' he asked her sharply.

'You'll only scare her like that,' protested Liz. 'Let me talk to her.' She drew Sarah aside and dried her sudden tears.

'Now, Sarah, remember about the sailors and their Meccano set? Show the Admiral where they hid it, there's a good girl.'

'Meccano?' whimpered Sarah.

'Yes, the one you told us that was put in a hole in the ground. Remember? Then we'll go home and you can have your sweets,' she added quickly in a whisper.

'Yes,' Sarah answered at last. 'Yes it were over by the stones. Likely it was here, I think.' Gottfried came forward and Fritz poked around with his shovel.

'Nichts,' he grunted.

'The ground hasn't been touched around here,' said Gottfried.

Simon spoke up. 'Sarah, did you mean *under* the rocks?'

'Uh,' replied Sarah.

'The rocks are fixed,' Gottfried muttered.

'Half a sec,' said Simon and moving towards the Kapitan managed to push Liz towards the fence. She caught on immediately and drew Sarah towards the hole in the wire.

‘Fritz, and you too, boy, come and help. There’s a heap of loose stones and earth here,’ the Kapitan rapped out. But as Fritz turned for his shovel he saw Liz half through the wire, struggling angrily with a long strand that had caught in her sweater.

‘Achtung, Herr Kapitan,’ he called and whipped out his pistol.

‘Don’t shoot, you thickhead!’ screamed Gottfried and reached out towards Fritz. The guard had changed his grip to the barrel and was swinging savagely at Liz, tangled and writhing in the barbed wire.

'PEOPLE DON'T SLIP sideways into some fourth dimension,' Mr Skinner was shouting. 'It's rubbish. You can't just vanish out of your own time. And what's more, Mr Traynor, I'm not going to be pushed around. You stopped being my CO when I was demobbed in 1940 so belt up... God, my head.'

Skinner had fallen to his knees and was rocking from side to side, head in hands, groaning.

Traynor looked down at him. 'What's wrong?'

'My head. Like a toothache, only worse.'

He scrambled up and stared at Traynor. 'Your ideas are crazy nonsense.' He turned away towards St Oswald and Traynor followed him.

They climbed together through the gap in the stone wall and Skinner, out of breath and in distress, sat down holding a hand to his forehead. Traynor squatted beside him. 'What,' he asked, 'if it isn't moonshine? What if people could get caught in time and slip from one stream to another. What then?'

Skinner rubbed his head. 'I need Disprin more than theories. You haven't got a couple? No, that would be too much to expect.'

Traynor looked interested. 'A headache? Here?' He reached out a finger, traced an area on Skinner's skull with a delicate finger.

'That's it. Hurts like hell and I keep seeing flashes of light—very bright. I remember that from 1940. They said it was referred pain in the optic nerve.'

Traynor crouched towards him. 'It's important that we find out what happened during the German take-over to cause these headaches of yours. I was under close guard but you had some freedom and I gave you a job to do. Remember?'

'No!'

'If we could get your memory working you might produce invaluable information. Only you could do it—or the children.'

Skinner sank his head in his hands.

'You've been making my headache worse. If you haven't got a Disprin, please shut up.'

Traynor fell silent for a while and then in a persuasive voice took up his argument once more.

'Skinner, being a scientist today teaches one not to be content with just what can be seen or felt. There are other realities which emerge as we examine the universe—mysteries unfolding beyond the limits of our knowledge.' He turned to look down into the bowl of darkness that contained the old ruins and Skinner followed his gaze.

'My head's better,' he said in a tired voice. 'Let's get back to The Bull.'

Jean Skinner sat in the lounge looking occasionally through the window. Tea was on the way. Bradley set it down by the armchair.

'There you are, Mrs Skinner. Nice strong cuppa just like mother used to make. Like me to be mum?'

‘No, thanks,’ answered Jean. ‘Just leave it to stand a moment. Is Mr Skinner about?’

‘No, just after he took you upstairs he went out again with Mr Traynor. Up to the old Naval Station, though what they went for I wouldn’t know. Creepy place to my way of thinking and best left alone. No sense in digging up the past. I mean it’s all over and done with, all that.’

He left Jean. After she had poured out her cup of tea she sat brooding over St Oswald, its Naval Station, and her husband’s sudden impulse to revisit what seemed to her a place of ill-omen. She fell back drowsily and sighed. The electronic sound-stream full of morse, howling and bursts of gabbled dialogue had begun again quite gently and this time it brought a hazy picture that seemed to flicker on and off in the lounge. Then she sat bolt upright. Across the room for a moment she had seen Liz with a mug in her hand, bending over a sleeping sailor on a couch.

‘Frank,’ she was saying. ‘I’ve got some coffee for you. Come on... wake up. It’ll make you feel better.’

Jean’s cup crashed to the floor and she screamed, ‘Liz,’ at the top of her voice.

Traynor and Skinner bolted up the stairs into the lounge.

‘I’ve just seen Liz,’ Jean told them breathlessly. ‘Here, in this room. She was giving coffee to a young sailor in a scruffy sort of games room—he was sick or unconscious.’

‘Unconscious, Mrs Skinner. It was your husband in 1940. Was there a billiard table in the room?’

‘Yes. Behind the sofa, I think. The picture didn’t last long and wasn’t in any detail—a sort of flashback.’

‘Exactly,’ answered Traynor, ‘a flashback to 1940 where your daughter is now.’

‘Liz in World War II?’ Jean was incredulous. ‘With a sailor called Frank?’

‘That’s my belief, Mrs Skinner.’

‘Then they’re in danger?’

‘No.’

‘What then?’

Traynor chose his words carefully. ‘We’re facing conditions in which the past doesn’t actually exist. But because of the energy that was then released it can produce an effect of reality. A sensitive or telepathic person reacts to this bubble of energy. They penetrate into or communicate with the complex of events but it’s not a reality for them—rather an exceptionally vivid hallucination. For Liz and Simon who accept the reality of this 1940 scene wholeheartedly, the events are vivid and disturbing. But there is no physical danger for them in this situation because it happened thirty years ago.’

Jean said, ‘But we can’t leave them there. I can’t anyway. So—what do you suggest we do?’

‘Do?’

‘Yes. *What do we do?*’

‘Well, dear lady,’ Traynor was very smooth, ‘what would you suggest?’

And with that he went down to the bar.

Jean and her husband sat quietly together. They had settled on the sofa and Jean reached out a hand to him tenderly. They spoke no word for several minutes before she realized that tears were dropping from her eyes. She heard Frank say, ‘Let’s go to bed, Jean. You must be tired out.’

He looked at her in concern. She had fallen back on the sofa, her eyes closed, her face a set mask of fear. Suddenly she sat bolt upright, her eyes wide open, and she was screaming. 'A German, by a wire fence. He's going to hit her. Oh, Liz!'

SIMON FROZE with fear as Gottfried swung round on him.

‘Tricks again! You lying, untrustworthy brat. Now they’ll head for the village and...’ He turned on Fritz. ‘Get a message through to have the girls picked up. And you,’ he ordered Simon, ‘you follow me.’

Simon took a regretful look towards where he believed the hole in the time barrier should be and trudged after the Kapitan until they reached the Recreation room.

Traynor looked up as they entered. ‘Where are the two girls?’ he asked severely.

‘They’ve got away.’

Gottfried left them. ‘I’m going to be very busy, Commander,’ he said. ‘I’ll leave your collaborator with you. Though sometimes he gives me a funny feeling that there’s a third party at work among us here.’

Traynor looked quizzically at the Kapitan’s back and just as suspiciously at Simon.

‘Well, what’s the latest turn you’ve put on for the troops?’ he asked.

Simon shrugged dismally. 'Tried to escape. Liz and Sarah got away but the Kapitan got in my way.'

Traynor sat looking at Simon pondering on this information.

'Then they'll alert the police,' he said.

'I don't know if it will work out like that. The Kapitan has sent a signal to someone to pick them up.'

'I was watching some of that.'

'They get messages back too.'

'From the village?'

'Yes.'

'Of course. They'll have a series of contacts from here to the coast, and across to Holland even. They will keep this lot informed about when to move and when to stay put. And where do you fit into all this, young man?'

'I've told you, I don't!' Simon shouted so loudly that Graz reached for his pistol.

Traynor laughed and waved him down.

Simon went on more calmly. 'You mean that they've got spies helping them. We don't have spies in England... well, do we, sir?'

'Don't we just,' Traynor said bitterly.

'And, Mr Traynor, why here? I mean a little place like St Oswald? There'd have to be some special reason for coming here. Old Gottfried knew all about that radio set; I could see that it wasn't news to him.'

Traynor frowned heavily. 'For a kid who knows more than he should, Simon, you ask some damn fool questions. And not so much of that Mr Traynor stuff. We're in the Navy here.'

'I only...' Simon stammered.

The Commander picked up a cue and played a rather careless stroke on the billiard table. 'I think you'd better lie low and say nuffin'

for a while,' he said. 'You may be on the side of the angels but I don't understand how, and I don't trust you.'

In the Operations room the Kapitan and Fritz continued their search. The heavier filing cabinets they had already examined but there were rows of locked drawers. Gottfried felt that he might find the clue to this small establishment somewhere among them. It need be no more than a sheet of paper or a special tool or a piece of material. At the end of one bank of cabinets he looked to his left into the back room and turned towards it. Fritz was scrambling through the shelves of a cupboard, looking at an accumulation of radio equipment and maintenance gear. He shook his head in a bored way every few seconds.

Gottfried stood arms akimbo and slowly inspected the back room. Two waist-high cupboards interested him. They stood against the wall opposite the work bench and a mixed lot of tools and materials was piled against them.

'Moment,' he called out to Fritz.

He entered the Recreation room to find Traynor bending over Frank. 'Feeling better?' Traynor was asking. 'Anything you want?'

Frank's voice was wavering a little. 'No, no, I don't think so...'

Gottfried looked down at him. 'Are you recovered? What happened? What was it that hit you?'

Frank pushed himself up on one elbow. 'What do you mean "happened"? I got a headache and saw bright lights. A ruddy Christmas tree it was.'

'Bright lights?' Gottfried seemed surprised.

'Yes, and then a blackout. What's this crummy place here?' He looked Traynor up and down. 'You in the Navy, chum?'

Traynor and Gottfried looked at one another. Then the Kapitan said, 'I need a detail for a small job, Commander. I think this man could work. It might help him.'

'Maybe,' Traynor said doubtfully. 'It would have to be light work.'

'Come, on your feet, man.' Gottfried tapped Frank's shoulder. Frank scrambled shakily upright. 'I'm fine now,' he said looking at Gottfried. 'You in the Navy too?'

For a German officer the Kapitan took this bravely and turned to Traynor. 'Perhaps the boy would be a help. I'll take him as well.'

The three left and Traynor gazed speechlessly after them. He wondered apprehensively what Frank might blurt out in his stupefied condition.

'Skinner,' said Gottfried. 'I want to search these cupboards. You and the boy will remove all this stuff.'

'Very good, sir,' said Skinner. He seemed quite normal again and even gestured a salute as Gottfried left.

He stretched up, examined Simon and looked interested when Simon said, 'I overheard the Commander trying to ask you about a job you had to do. Did you do it?'

'I expect so, sonny. You're a bit young for the Navy, aren't you?'

'Me? I'm still at school.'

'What I mean, son. Who are you?'

'You know me. I'm Simon. I came in with Liz earlier tonight. You arrested us.'

'Ah, maybe. Well, come on, let's clear all this junk for the new bloke.'

Frank started to clear the cupboards, then stood up and stretched his back. 'Dunno what he wants to look in these for. This one's got

rum, spirits and table wines in it and this one is full of pilchards and tomato sauce. Still... you can't tell 'em anything.'

He stood up with an armful of perforated angle iron and dropped it gently on the work bench. As he straightened again he saw the peg-board on the wall and reached up towards the tiny switch concealed behind it.

'That's it. Now push the door to.' He was talking quietly, as if to himself, Simon thought. The main door swung to and the panel slid open. The servo was in operation but the framework carrying the cylinder stood a bit askew. Simon took a step towards it but Frank pulled him back. 'Disconnect power,' he whispered. He was trembling a little. 'Like this.' He reached for the sockets and wrenched out the plugs. Abruptly the remote murmur stopped. 'Now destroy it.' Frank went on softly.

'Destroy it? That's sabotage.'

'No, no. CO's orders,' Frank insisted and reached for the framework. For all his weakness he worked fast on the butterfly nuts and the assembly screws of the cylindrical interior. The pieces disappeared among the metal and radio parts they had cleared from the front of the wine cupboards.

Simon watched and helped as Frank's energies slowly faded. They kept up a clatter of metal in the room and as they dismantled the central apparatus Simon distributed its bits as widely as possible. He knew now, to his amazement, what the Station was for. And he knew, with more than fear, that he must conceal this knowledge both from Traynor and Gottfried.

AT THE HEART of the assembly Simon had found the ruby. Frank looked at it casually. 'A glass rod,' he whispered.

'Yes,' said Simon and tossed it among the rubbish on the bench. 'Something like that.'

The cabinet was empty. 'Switch,' gasped Frank.

Simon reached up to flip the servo, the cabinet closed noiselessly and Frank sank to his hands and knees. 'Frank!' Simon shouted at him. He heard a step and, turning, faced Gottfried. 'I think he's fainted again, sir,' he said.

'When you call me sir, you wake up all my worst suspicions,' snapped the Kapitan.

'Better look for yourself then, sir,' said Simon, drawing back and Gottfried, after turning Frank over on his back, snarled, 'Fritz, der Matrose ist wieder krank.'[‡]

[‡] *'The sailor is sick again.'*

Gottfried stood among the well-searched contents of Traynor's office. The floor was littered with papers and a few tools and instruments

were piled on the desk. He flung himself into Traynor's chair and shouted, 'Herein.'

Graz brought Traynor in. Gottfried waved him silently to the chair facing the desk.

'Nobody,' he said, 'knows anything about those children of yours, Commander. Nobody in the village, that is.'

'Tell me, Gottfried,' Traynor asked. 'Who is the nobody in the village who doesn't know them?'

The Kapitan leant across the desk. 'Graz,' he said, 'tie him up. If he won't talk to us about his work you can talk to him about yours.' Graz moved so swiftly towards the back of Traynor's chair slipping a cord around him that all the Commander could do was cry out in surprise. His shoulders were jerked back and he turned angrily.

'What the?...' he shouted.

'Halt's Maul Englander,'[‡] Graz shouted back and struck him across the face with an open hand. Traynor turned his head to Gottfried.

[‡] *'Shut up Englishman.'*

'You can't be serious, man,' he said in outrage.

'You give us no choice,' Gottfried answered.

'Me? You have the choice here. You, who were talking earlier about being a reasonable man—a scientist.'

Graz sank half a dozen savage blows into Traynor's belly.

'Gottfried,' he gasped. 'So you're just another of the Hitler gang after all.'

Graz delivered another punch and then seizing Traynor's hair dragged his head back again. He raised his Luger and swept it down in a cruel blow across the Commander's face. Traynor arched his back and gasped with the pain which tore through him. Gottfried

swung round on Graz. 'Genug, genug. Halt,' he shouted at him and stepped forward between the two men.

'Graz,' he snapped. 'Machen Sie den Kommander frei.'[‡]

[‡] *'Free the commander.'*

An amazed and furious Graz loosened the knots and stepped warily back, pistol in hand.

'It was a foolish mistake,' Gottfried went on. 'This is a foolish way to behave and I am sorry.'

'You're sorry? Think how I feel,' Traynor growled as the blood trickled down his face. 'And don't think you're going to get information out of me. There's nothing to tell and that's final.'

'Graz will take you to the Recreation room. We'll continue our discussion when you've had time to get to grips with your predicament and I have considered my own findings. It will take a little longer, I suppose. Go with Graz.'

Traynor, stiff and sore, got to his feet and left with his guard. The Kapitan leant back in his swivel chair and spun round in it. He was depressed by what had happened and sat gazing at the floor. The panel of the skirting board caught his eye and quickly he kicked it open and searched. One paper clip, new and shining, was all.

So this hiding place had been in use. He left the office, brooding, hands clasped behind his back. What a fool to let Graz beat up this English scientist. The secrets that matter are seldom on paper in their basic stages. It's the man's own thoughts one must try to prise out of their hiding places.

THE BAR at The Bull was busy and noisy that evening. But when Liz and Sarah walked in, silence fell like a cold blanket. Even upstairs the Skinners could feel it.

Then talk exploded.

'You're back!... Where you been, you two? Arthur seen you vanish, Sal! '

'You had us all worried sick,' said Bradley.

'You was up the potholes. I'll bet.'

'Potholes?' stammered Sarah. 'Yes, yes the potholes, Mr Bradley,' she exclaimed as Liz gave her a sharp dig in the ribs. Behind them Traynor watched this prompting from the door. Then Jean wrapped a laughing, hugging Liz in her arms.

In the happiness of their reunion Jean turned to Bradley. 'Do get someone to take poor Sarah home,' she said. 'She's tired out and as for her mother...'

'I'll get our Eileen to walk her down road. They do better meet at home.' He turned and shouted down the hatch: 'Eileen! Wantcha!'

Liz found herself looking over Jean's shoulder into Traynor's eyes.

'*Commander* Traynor?' she whispered.

‘Yes,’ he murmured. ‘As I thought.’

He moved over to the bar as Eileen and Sarah went off. Bradley turned towards him, a triumphant smile on his face. But the eyes that stared back at him were cold and implacable.

Next morning, from the broad windows of the hotel lounge Liz gloomed over the dull, damp hillside. All through the midnight hours she and Jean had gone over their experiences, tallying Jean’s visions with her own actions inside the time bubble. Jean and Traynor and her father had tried to fill in the world of 1939 and 1940 with its months of phoney war, ending in Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain.

But constantly she was saddened by her father’s lost experience of those war years that had sharpened the wits and courage of others. Perhaps he would once again be a lively man if only she could help him find out what had destroyed the friendly sailor of 1940.

Jean talked to her over tea and toast. ‘He’s always felt maimed by the blank in his mind, like a man going through life without an arm or a leg.’

‘It hasn’t been very easy for you all these years with Dad like that, has it?’

‘I knew before we married. And we managed.’

‘It wouldn’t have mattered if it hadn’t made him feel so inadequate.’

Mr Skinner came in and they both looked at him. ‘Yes,’ Liz said kindly. ‘We were talking about you. I thought you made a marvellous sailor.’

Skinner grinned back. 'Nice to have a good report.' He looked up at Traynor who had followed, filling his pipe and trying to look as if he wasn't going to ask the impossible. He added, 'We thought the world of you.' Liz looked across at Skinner and felt her throat tighten. Traynor lit his pipe smokily and went to the windows. Jean poured another cup of tea. The early mists had cleared from the hillside and the ragged Station sheds showed up hazily.

'If you want to know how much,' Traynor turned to Liz, 'you'll have to go back and find out.'

The Skinners gasped and Jean snapped out, 'I suppose you'll swear on a stack of Bibles that Liz can't possibly come to any harm and then you'll apologize when you're proved wrong.'

'But,' Liz cut in. 'He's been proved right so far, hasn't he?'

'A fat lot of good that's been. We still don't really know what happened in there, and Simon hasn't come back.'

Jean was irritated but Traynor kept his cool.

'You must admit, Mrs Skinner, that no harm has come to the children and we believe Simon is safe. Now please hear me out. We know Mr Skinner dismantled the machine in the secret cabinet because we found the bits after the raid. But those papers and notes of mine behind the skirting... we don't know if Gottfried saw them or not. We found them but we can't know so far if he read them and then put them back. They outlined the theoretical basis for the machine. Gottfried was no fool and now he's in Russia. Their people picked him up at the Peenemunde rocket site in forty-five. His knowledge, our knowledge, would be theirs if he had had twenty minutes with my notes and drawings.'

'It's a long time ago,' Jean said. 'And why would he put your notes back?'

‘So we wouldn’t know whether or not *he* knew. To confuse us. Come, Mrs Skinner. What have you to fear? You and Liz can communicate telepathically. Maybe you don’t want to admit it. But you can.’

After dusk Traynor’s car drew up at the break in the Station wall and with the Skinners he climbed silently into the field. The Skinners hunched together tense and unhappy. Traynor took Liz halfway down the hill.

‘Here?’

‘Maybe. Let me try farther down.’

‘Any luck?’

‘Nothing.’

‘Try farther down.’

‘Still nothing.’

‘Go on.’

‘I’m inside the main block,’ Liz cried out in a strangled voice. ‘And I’m still in 1970.’ She came at full tilt past Traynor, brushing him aside, crying, ‘Frank, Frank, I can’t get back.’

Skinner near the wall caught her in his arms.

‘Ah, Liz, don’t be upset,’ he said quietly.

Jean patted her on the shoulder.

‘Oh, but Daddy, I do so much want to help you,’ Liz sobbed. ‘I’m sure I could if I can find out what happened in the Station.’

‘Don’t think about it, Liz, darling,’ he said and drew her away from the others. They began to walk aimlessly over the grass.

‘It doesn’t really matter what happened to me,’ he went on. ‘I’ve lived with it all these years and we’ve had a happy life together. Perhaps it’s better if we don’t know.’

They turned downhill and Liz clung to his arm. She thought how brave he must be to face giving up the chance of knowing about himself. They stopped and looked into the ruins and moved down a few paces.

She felt the gently trembling barrier against her body. Her father had disappeared through it.

‘Daddy,’ she gasped.

He reappeared. ‘The barrier?’ he said quietly, looking uphill towards Jean and Traynor hazy against the dark wall.

‘Yes. Can you feel it?’

‘No.’

‘It’s here,’ she put out a hand.

‘Go through.’

‘I have to find the hole for the timeslip to work.’

‘Quick, then.’

Liz moved to and fro a few paces. Skinner watched, nervous and silent. She disappeared. When she picked herself up from the grass it was a cool May night. Her father stood looking worried a yard away. She reached out to touch him. Her hand went right through him and she shuddered but then remembered she was thirty years away from him. She paused and listened and stepped again towards the hole. Once through she spoke.

‘It works. I saw you. Put an arm through you.’

‘You want to go back in?’

‘Yes, but you go up the hill. It’s horrid being able to see you but not talk to you.’

They separated.

‘Shall I tell Jean?’ he whispered.

‘She knows.’

Then he couldn’t hear her any more.

KEYS RATTLED AT THE DOOR. AS it swung open the Commander was pushed through. Graz followed. Simon leapt to his feet. 'Are you all right, sir?' he asked shakily.

Traynor was in rough shape, trickles of blood drying on his face. 'Me?' he said. 'I'm right as rain. Who needs all these ribs, anyway?' He prodded himself over one or two tender areas, as Simon turned to play with the snooker balls. Frank sat quietly on the sofa.

'The job, sir,' began Simon. 'The one Frank had to do. Was it to destroy a sort of ray gun in the secret cabinet?' Traynor glared at him.

'I found the switch by accident and Frank came round when he saw this thing. We broke it up and threw the bits among the junk. Was it OK?'

'Yes,' said Traynor. 'It was OK. What makes you think it was some sort of ray gun?'

'Well, it looked like one. There was this little rod of ruby in the middle of it all. I chucked that in with the rest of the junk...' He stopped as he caught sight of Traynor's glowering expression.

'Sonny, if I had time I'd set up a special inquiry on you. But you'll have the chance to prove whose side you're on soon enough.'

‘What’s that mean?’

‘I’ve got a built-in prejudice against rough stuff being used on me. So I’m going to take over command of my Station the hard way. Listen...’

If Skinner does his bit we may make it, the Commander thought. The boy’s an unknown quantity. At best a disturbance. Well, here goes.

Graz was sitting yawning by the door. Traynor bent over the fireplace and knocked his pipe out into the ashes. The taps ended and from Frank came a long-drawn-out groan as he collapsed to the floor. Graz stepped over to him and, as he bent down, a fast-moving, double-fisted rabbit punch from Traynor connected with the base of his skull. Frank crawled weakly out from under the collapsed guard and staggered away. Traynor grabbed the Luger and Simon leapt at the door, keys in hand.

One keyhole and a dozen keys. He tried them clumsily, hands trembling.

‘Hurry, blast you!’ gritted Traynor. ‘Here, let me try.’ Neither, panting and distracted, noticed that Graz was again on his feet. Frank did, but after swinging a shaky fist, folded from a low sickening punch from the German.

Traynor grunted sharply as Graz threw a powerful arm round his neck. He twisted, trying to get free enough to use the Luger as a club but Graz shifted fast to an armlock.

Graz swung his whole weight and Traynor was flung across the room. In a mist of pain he heard Simon call, ‘Come on, come on, the door’s open.’

The Luger lay between him and Graz. Mustn’t let him get near my ribs, he thought, and slid down the wall, shamming weakness.

Then fast and sudden he rolled on top of the gun. It took all Traynor's guts to whip round once more on the floor, and Graz who came down heavily on one knee screamed with pain. With the Luger held in both hands Traynor swayed breathless to his feet.

'Drop the pistol, Commander,' he heard from the door where Gottfried and Fritz stood side by side. 'Try tunnelling next time. It is less noisy.'

The Luger slid from his hands as Graz hit him savagely from behind. Falling and fading out he heard Gottfried ask sharply, 'The boy. Where is the boy?'

Simon had made for the front door where—as usual it seemed—signalling was in progress. He tiptoed back to the Operations room and hearing Gottfried snapping at Fritz, he stepped quickly into a tall, broad cupboard full of overcoats, umbrellas, overalls and working gear. The door was ajar and he could see some of the room and hear Gottfried grumbling at Fritz.

Then Gottfried disappeared into the back room and shut the door.

Simon stood wondering what his next chance would be. His ambitions were very simple. Out the front door, through the wire, the barrier and to The Bull.

'Fritz,' called a voice and the guard from the front door appeared with a message pad. Fritz took a couple of sheets. 'Herr Kapitan,' he called at the back-room door.

Gottfried read the message and called Fritz back. Simon crouched low and tiptoed along a bank of cabinets. He went softly through the front door where the guard was preoccupied with St Oswald and tiptoed round the corner where he fell over the first of a row of metal dustbins. Lids clattered. He froze.

'Was ist das?' called the guard in a tight voice.

Simon repressed a giggle as footsteps drew nearer. The guard kicked the bins, lids rattled. He lifted one loose lid and kicked again. A spitting, enraged cat leapt from the bin and shot away up the hill. The guard flung the lid after it and went back to his post.

For ten minutes Simon crouched between the bins. Some smelt, some didn't. Must get on, he thought. If I go uphill a bit, then round, I'll find the exit.

He set out, keeping low and moving slowly along a wide detour. At first he paused frequently but once his eyes had become used to the dark he moved faster. During one pause in his progress he felt a scream bubble up in his throat. He dug his fingers into the long grass and took a deep breath. An animal of some kind had taken the calf of his leg in its mouth. It was a soft bite but he waited for teeth to pierce skin and crush bone. Lie still, he told himself. If I lie quite still it *must* go away.

'Looking for something?' A whisper came from his left. He sneaked a glance. He could just see a round object with pale tawny fur. The grip on his leg tightened. He looked harder and his leg began to shake.

'If you're looking for the hole it's farther along,' said the funny object.

'Liz. You stupid nit. Playing games out here. I'd kick your face in, you... You've got no sense whatever.' His rage blew up further as he realized the oddity of Liz being there at all.

'Anyway, what are you doing here? You got away, now you're back and it makes it twice as hard for us to escape. Where did you say the hole is?'

‘Farther along. But we can’t go back yet. Come up over the hill a bit,’ Liz whispered.

They crept as silently as they could out of the guard’s hearing and in two minutes Liz had filled Simon in about her return with Sarah.

‘Well, that’s that. Now we go too,’ said Simon.

‘No.’

‘I’ve had enough of it. Things are getting rough in there.’

‘We can’t get hurt and there are things we have to do.’

‘Like?’

‘Like finding out if horrible Gottfried has read some papers from a secret cupboard in the Commander’s office. It’s important. National security.’

‘NO.’

‘You’re a creep, Simon. Scared. Anyway, I’ve got to go back. Because of Frank. Can’t you see that?’

Simon lay tugging at bits of long grass. He stood up. ‘I think there’s something the matter with me. I’m supposed to be bright. But you seem to be able to talk me into anything.’

Liz jumped up.

‘You’re just good-hearted, that’s all. Come on, down to the Station.’

The guard was working the signalling lamp as they came round the corner.

‘We’ve come back,’ they called.

He dropped the lamp and turned, raising both hands above his head.

Commander Traynor, still dazed from the blow Graz had struck, sat slumped in a chair opposite Gottfried. He was seated the wrong side of his desk. Gottfried leant across it. 'Commander, I must apologize again for the way my men behave. This is no way for men of science to conduct their disputes.'

Traynor looked at him with irritation. 'For the Lord's sake, Gottfried, stop trying to act out your idea of an "English Gentleman". There's a war on and we are enemies. Your men are thugs and I can't wait to pay back their thuggery.'

'It was never likely that you would tell me directly what you are doing here. But to deny convincingly conclusions which I put forward—now that would be another matter.'

'Conclusions? You have none.'

'We are both scientists. Sailors and soldiers—the professional ones—lie to each other as a matter of course. But not men of science. There would be a look in the eye, a lack of conviction. Imagine trying to deny Einstein's theory of relativity. It's not that it can't be done. It's that you can't do it and not look a liar or a fool.'

'I take your point.'

'Good. Because there are matters of great interest in this establishment after all.'

'We've been through this once before.'

'True, but not with this in evidence.' He let his fist fall on the desk and opened it. The ruby rod lay gleaming under the desk lamp.

'What, I wonder, would a ruby be doing lying about in the back room?'

'So you found my little ruby?' Traynor asked with a trace of amusement.

'Tossed a bit too casually among some radio parts on the work bench.'

‘You’re a man of the world in your way, Gottfried. I picked the stone up in London and one of my fitters here who was in the jewellery trade is going to make a pendant of it for a girlfriend of mine. Simple as that.’

‘Don’t joke with me, Commander,’ an angered Gottfried replied. ‘We will be serious. Rubies may flatter girlfriends but they also have hardness, clarity and other properties that make them ideal for carrying out experiments with light. This isn’t a jewel. It’s an industrial ruby. There is also some other evidence. So don’t be stupid. It isn’t becoming to a man of your standing.’

‘You aren’t getting far, Herr Kapitan,’ began Traynor when Fritz appeared in the door. He looked a little mad.

‘Was geht?’ Gottfried snapped, angry at the interruption.

‘Die Kinder,’ sighed Fritz.

They appeared one each side of him.

‘Hello,’ they said.

‘Why?’ a long questioning look from Gottfried.

‘We just thought we’d come back,’ Simon began.

‘Because you don’t belong to the village and even Commander Traynor doesn’t know who you are. You’ll stay under close guard until we move off.’

They listened and Simon’s eyes took in the contents of the desk top. The ruby shone under the lamp and he raised his eyes to Traynor whose glance was severe and warning. I get the message, thought Simon, and he shuffled his feet and looked meekly over at Gottfried.

‘I’m sorry, sir, only it was a bit late to get back,’ he said.

‘Go with Fritz,’ said the Kapitan, and gave long instructions to the guard. Neither Simon nor Liz understood but Traynor frowned.

‘Behave yourselves,’ he said. ‘This time they really are furious with you. And me,’ he added tapping his chest with his finger.

They turned and followed Fritz. Gottfried was saying, ‘So Commander—light—now we will talk about light and its uses.’

Graz opened the Recreation room and Fritz pushed in Liz and Simon. He talked a long minute to Graz, passing on Gottfried’s orders. Graz locked the door, turned to Simon and cuffed his ears. Liz had gone swiftly across to Frank.

‘Frank,’ she said and put an arm round his shoulders. He looked dazed.

‘Are you all right, Frank?’ Liz asked.

‘Girlie,’ he asked. ‘Are *you* all right? I mean, who are you?’

‘You know. You arrested me.’

‘What are you doing in a place like this, anyway?’

‘I think he’s lost his memory already, Liz,’ Simon said quietly.

Liz looked aghast.

‘Already? Oh no.’

Frank looked at them both. ‘There’s something familiar about you two. But you keep making me think there’s something I had to do.’ He turned away towards the billiard table. Full of concern Liz followed him. Simon stood overshadowed by a menacing Graz. He caught Simon’s hair and twisted back his head. A heavy slap to and fro across Simon’s face brought a shout of rage from Simon who began to kick ineffectually at Graz’s shins. Liz flung herself into the fight, screaming and flailing at Graz with her fists and Frank roused to consciousness shouted, ‘Stop it, stop it—treating kids like that.’ He leapt on Graz’s back and started to pull him over towards the sofa.

‘Liz, Liz, the window. Graz is crazy, he’ll kill us,’ shouted Simon. He ripped down the blackout and shoved and pushed at the stiff window.

Like a great bear breaking a flimsy cage Graz shook Frank off, whipped out his Luger and fired. Liz screamed as the shot echoed round the room. From outside came a hammering on the door and shouts in German.

‘Come on, Liz, we’ve got to get out of here,’ called Simon. ‘Come on.’

He pulled her towards the window and helped her up and out. The hammering and shouting outside grew louder. Frank struggled to his feet to take on Graz who raised the Luger and fired again. Liz fell unconscious from the window-sill and a dark bloodstain seeped across her right side. Behind them the door burst in, falling from its hinges. Gottfried and his two guards moved swiftly, weapons ready, into the room.

TRAYNOR TAPPED a coin on the counter to catch Bradley's attention. He came, a bit too eagerly, to take his order, and looked a bit too anxious to please.

'Gin and tonic,' said Traynor coldly and paid. He heard Jean's voice outside the bar.

'...you hadn't any right to do it, Frank. No right.' She swept through the bar followed by Skinner who was protesting gently.

'But, Jean, listen...'

Their voices were lost in the clatter of glasses and bar talk.

Skinner reappeared at Traynor's side. He looked dulled and unhappy.

'Shut me out of the lounge,' he murmured. 'Says she wasn't sure if she wanted to let Liz go back. Wanted to be sure about what you'd been telling us.'

'Let's go out in the yard,' said Traynor. 'It's a warm night.'

The two men strolled together on the cobbled yard.

'You know anything about missile interception, Skinner?' asked Traynor.

'You mean spotting and destroying rockets up in the blue. Only newspaper stuff really.'

‘Right,’ Traynor said. ‘It’s what I’m working on now. A complex business. Rockets fly high today. We know they are being made to home on targets from immense distances out in space. Distances which put them beyond reliable interception by radio signal.’

‘So?’ said Skinner.

‘So, imagine a beam of light. Powerful, fast, because it moves at the ultimate speed, and accurate. And then imagine that physicists in one country had developed such an interceptor but didn’t know when, how or if an unfriendly country had done so. They would know that in the present state of the art it *could* be done but what progress had been made would depend on *when* the enemy started work.’

‘I see what you mean,’ said Skinner. ‘If Gottfried read your notes they would have started in the late forties.’

‘That’s why it matters and that’s why Liz...’

He stopped short as an agonized cry came to them from the windows of the lounge. Both men looked up.

Pressed against the pane Jean could just be seen, hands and face blurred, crying and sobbing distractedly.

They rushed to the stairs. Jean’s cries must have gone unheard in the noisy bar.

She was crouching by the window, holding her face in her hands. ‘Liz, oh, my poor poor Liz,’ she sobbed, and when the two men tried to lift her up she shook them off. Long shuddering sobs began to shake her body and after a moment she fell limp and unconscious.

They carried her to the sofa.

‘I’ll get her a brandy,’ said Traynor.

As he returned she moved back into consciousness.

Skinner pressed the spirit to her lips and slowly she revived.

‘Frank,’ she said in a shaking voice. ‘Liz is dead. They shot her.’

‘Are you sure she’s dead—even wounded?’ Traynor asked.

'I can't tell. She's dead. Oh God, Frank, why did you ever let her go back?'

'Mrs Skinner,' Traynor insisted. He was looking at her gravely. 'Please listen. You must believe me when I say that Liz is not dead. Not even really hurt.'

'After I saw her shot? How can you say such things?'

'Because visitors from the future can't come to any permanent harm. They're there in a removed sense. But something they associate with harm or violence could create a deep impression of physical damage, like hypnotic states do.'

'Mr Traynor, *I saw the blood patch on her pullover*. I watched it spreading. Now who was doing the Imagining? Me or Liz?'

AS GOTTFRIED WALKED into the Recreation room he was met by a flood of protest from Frank and Simon and a guttural speech of self-justification from Graz.

‘Ruhe!’ he shouted. Even Frank and Simon recognized what that meant. Like Graz they shut up.

Gottfried stepped up to Graz and held out his hand for the guard’s pistol. He balanced it in his hand and raising it deliberately struck Graz twice across the face. He took it with a sharp hissing intake of breath each time. Gottfried spat a curse at him and turned to Simon.

‘How badly is she hurt?’

‘She’s dead.’

Gottfried took a long look at Liz.

‘She’s breathing.’ He turned and dismissed the two guards and tapped Frank on the shoulder.

‘Help move her gently to the couch.’

Liz lay breathing gently. She looks more scared than hurt, Simon thought, and Gottfried seemed to feel this too but then he had lost out on every encounter with these unpredictable children.

‘Let me look at this wound,’ Gottfried said. He rolled up her jumper and shirt. The blood had begun to dry.

‘Curious,’ he said. ‘Very curious. Blood but no wound.’

Liz was flinching at the feel of his fingers.

‘Skinner,’ said Gottfried. ‘Get water. And first-aid kit.’ Frank moved off and reappeared with first-aid box and cold water.

Liz protested wildly at the cold water. ‘It hurts,’ she screamed. ‘The bullet went right through me.’

‘Curiouser and curiouser, Miss Skinner,’ said Gottfried. ‘My man must have missed. No entry wound—no exit wound. Some blood. A common hysterical symptom.’

‘But it hurts—it really does,’ Liz protested.

‘It would,’ Gottfried said. ‘It will get better.’ He wiped the blood off quickly with cold damp cotton wool.

Liz screamed. ‘You’re hurting. It’s like a knife.’

‘It will pass,’ said the Kapitan, and turned to Graz.

‘Nun,’ he growled, ‘was ist hier geschehen?’[‡]

[‡] *‘So, what happened here?’*

Graz stammered out an explanation and Gottfried stood deep in thought. ‘Es passt mir nicht,’ [‡] [‡] he said in a tone of deep dissatisfaction. ‘You three English. The lock is broken so out of here and into the back room. Come on, young lady. Your performance was good but the comedy’s over. Get up and walk.’

^{‡‡} *‘I don’t understand.’*

‘I can’t,’ said Liz. ‘I’m hurt, wounded.’

‘Not a sign of a wound. Tell her, Simon.’

‘There’s not a scratch on you, Liz, really,’ said Simon. ‘Let’s get out of here. I don’t fancy getting locked up with old Graz and his gun again.’

‘Nor me,’ said Liz who was feeling her ribs for the wound and looking amazed as she found no break in the skin.

Gottfried stamped his foot.

‘Off with you—you’re wasting my time. Into the back room. Fritz!’ he called at the top of his voice. He gave him curt orders and turned towards the Commander’s office. The others followed Fritz and left a sulky Graz leaning against the shattered door. He had a foul look in his eye as he watched them go.

The heavy door of the back room closed tightly behind them when Fritz pulled it to. They looked hopelessly at one another and cleared some space on the work bench. Simon found a spare parts box to sit on and Frank and Liz climbed up on the bench. For a while there was silence.

‘Frank, are you all right?’ Liz said as she watched him rub his head with his hands.

‘Yes, yes. It’s only that muzzy feeling I keep getting. And you?’

‘Oh me. There was never anything wrong with me. I just thought I got shot to bits but beastly Graz missed.’

‘That makes us a couple of odd bods.’

‘Frank, can’t you remember anything about what happened to you? You’ve lost your memory. Well, there must be some reason for that.’

‘All that comes back to me is that I had something to do.’

‘No, not that—that was about dismantling the machine.’

‘How do you know about that?’

‘Simon told me. He was there and helped. What I mean is *before*. What was the accident that made you lose your memory?’

‘You’re a sweet kid, Liz. Here we are in the middle of a Nazi raid, and you and I are nothing to one another, but you worry about my troubles. That’s nice...’

It was more than Liz could take. 'Nothing?' she thought. 'Nothing?' She jumped off the bench. Frank went on:

'Here, don't get upset. I'd tell you what happened if only I knew.'

Her eyes filled with tears.

'Then it's a mystery that we won't ever be able to solve,' she said. 'Tell us—think hard—what had you been doing just before, say just after the Germans took over. You had some sort of orders. Who from?'

Liz kept up the questions; then Simon broke in.

'Frank, when you and I dismantled that machine after I found the secret cabinet...'

'Yes,' Frank answered vaguely.

'Well, although you were only half there you seemed to know what to do.'

'That's right.'

'Did you have a go at it before? When the power was still on. Did you? It would be sort of warm. And when I came in it was standing a bit askew.'

'Not so. First time I saw it, it was square on the cabinet floor and bang on target.' Frank nodded at the steel plate opposite.

'Then you *had* tried to move it. And you got a dose of the ray.'

'Maybe. I remember a lot of bright lights. Thought I'd got a crack on the head. From the cabinet door.'

'I REMEMBER a lot of bright lights. Thought I'd got a crack on the head. From the cabinet door...' Jean's voice was quite clear. Traynor and Skinner were sitting by her side, listening intently.

'It's very exhausting,' she said and fell back on the couch.

'This ray,' Skinner broke in. 'If it hit me, it started all those bright lights and headaches. What could have happened?'

'The beam we had then was a candle compared with what we have now. But if it just touched you...'

He turned away, aware of Jean's frowning inspection.

'Oh, come on,' said Skinner. 'I've been waiting thirty years to know what's wrong with me.'

'Who can tell, Skinner?' Traynor replied. 'Who can tell? Brain damage perhaps. Memory cells gone. They might come back slowly, the brain's a very adaptable organ.'

'Good grief, man,' said Skinner in a broken voice and Jean reached out a hand to him.

'Please, my dear. Just as long as we know at last. Everything's going to be all right from now on.'

Traynor stole away quietly down to the bar and found it empty. He looked about, examining the horse-brasses and plastic harness that hung on the shelves. Above, among some antiquated bottles stood an old naval signaller's lamp. Its realness stood out among the phoney decoration and he went behind the bar to take it down.

As he operated the lever it clattered and the shutters threw off a little cloud of dust.

Behind him Bradley spoke.

'I was just closing down for the night. Anything I can get you, sir?'

'No thanks.' Traynor put the lamp down between them. 'Marvellous jobs, aren't they? I don't suppose there's a better way of signalling been devised. I didn't know you were in the Navy though?'

'I wasn't. I spent the war here at St Oswald.'

'Practising signalling I suppose, Mr Bradley,' Traynor replied as he left the bar.

Bradley picked up the lamp. He was on the point of flinging it across the room, then turned and put it back on the shelf. He drew out the cash desk. A revolver lay on one side, covered by a duster. He broke the gun, loaded it from a cartridge packet and put it in his pocket. Pale with fear he cleared out the till and went slowly upstairs.

Jean stepped from one window to the other looking over the dark fields towards the ruins of the Station. Her fingers tapped her cheekbones as she tried to sense the strange electronic noises and the flashes of vision too abrupt for description... something... something she murmured... a movement... they're doing something wild in that room.

Traynor stood halfway down the stairs looking at Bradley. The landlord carried a suitcase. His right hand was buried in his mackintosh pocket. He drew it slowly out and pointed his revolver at Traynor.

‘Murder on top of treason, Bradley—why, they’d bring back hanging to oblige you. Besides, what’s your complaint? I’m not a policeman. There’s not really any proof against you.’

Bradley lowered his gun. Then he raised it and flung it at the signalling lamp. As it clattered to the floor he rushed out of the bar and Traynor listened as a car started in the yard and shot out of the drive-in.

He crossed to the bar and looked it over. ‘I think I could do with one on the house,’ he thought. So he had one.

He was sitting meditatively on a high stool when Skinner rushed in.

‘Come up. Jean’s got some contact again,’ he said.

‘Have a drink on the house,’ Traynor said. ‘I’m acting vice-landlord.’

‘In that case yes,’ said Skinner. ‘I feel all in.’ They climbed the stairs slowly but Jean shook her head.

‘It’s all faded away,’ she said. ‘Be patient now.’

GOTTFRIED WAS MAKING PROGRESS. And Traynor staring at him across his own desk was uneasy.

‘Are you going to speak, Commander?’

‘I hardly know what to say, Herr Kapitan.’

‘Then let’s begin with a simple premise. You are conducting experiments with light.’

‘Almost every scientist could be said to be doing that.’

‘Stop fencing. I have evidence and it will save time and trouble for you if you tell me about your work. Moreover, I know I can help you with it.’

‘For the cause of the Third Reich?’

‘For the cause of science and so of peace.’

‘Your delusions are quite extraordinary. My answer is simply no, nothing doing.’

Gottfried stamped to his feet and walking up and down stabbed at Traynor with his words: ‘You will have to face this problem sooner or later. If you won’t talk here you’ll come to Germany and they will make you glad to talk.’

‘You’re crazy.’ Traynor rose from his chair.

‘Not at all, Commander. We even have a box for you. A prick of a needle. A little sedation. You’ll wake up in Kiel—maybe Hamburg.’

‘You’re quite mad. After all your talk about men of peace and science. You’re a hypocrite, Gottfried.’

The Kapitan stopped dead in his tracks and glowered at Traynor. He protested in a low voice, ‘When you have seen what men will do to their own kind you will not be so ready with your judgements.’

In the back room three dejected prisoners sat in a dull silence.

‘Anything,’ announced Simon, ‘is better than this.’

‘Suggest something,’ snapped Liz, ‘if you’re so bright.’

‘I didn’t say I was bright. You said I was just good-hearted.’

‘Suggest some good hearted thing.’

‘Let’s wreck the place,’ spat out Simon. ‘I just hate being locked in here.’

‘That’s a thought,’ Frank said. ‘If we raise enough hell they may move us into the Officers’ quarters. Very posh.’

‘You’re both very funny and unhelpful,’ said Liz, but next moment she jumped at Frank, screaming, ‘Help.’

Behind her Simon was laying about the heaps of metal rubbish with a pick-handle. ‘Stop,’ she screamed, but Frank had joined in with a metal shelf and the din was doubled.

Raising hell being a catching kind of thing the noise was soon trebled. There was so much of it that none of them heard the door open. The first to notice was Simon.

‘Oh Lord! ’ he said, much diminished. ‘It would have to be old Graz.’

They dodged one another clumsily over a floor littered with rubbish and Simon might have made it through the door but for Liz

who called, wild and angry at him: 'You can't leave us now, you big coward. You started it. You stay and help.'

Graz and Frank were rolling painfully on the floor, Frank taking more punishment than he could really stand. Liz stood by with a bit of metal, trying vainly to make an impression on the German thug who had now got astride Frank. His pistol hand came up and he brought the Luger down.

Simon's fear left him. He swung the pick-handle high and let Graz have the heavy end across his skull.

He winded Frank as he fell on him.

'Come on, Liz,' called Simon. He grabbed the pistol and helped her roll the guard off Frank.

'Come on,' he called as he heard heavy footsteps out in the corridor. Then he hurried down behind the rank of cabinets. He was inside the overall cupboard before the guards came rushing in. Gottfried, gun in hand, and the Commander followed.

Traynor spoke savagely, 'Kapitan, you don't seriously mean to take me to Germany? You don't think I'll go—just like that.'

'You'll go, Commander. You've left me no choice. Graz!' he shouted. 'Dummkopf! Graz! Machen Sie schnell.'

But Graz was in no condition to make haste and when the guards went into the back room their curses brought Gottfried over too.

From the cupboard door Simon could just prod Traynor's back with Graz's pistol. He took it swiftly and slipped it into his trouser belt. He was waiting unconcernedly when the guards dragged Graz across the floor.

'I hope you've got a box for him,' Traynor sneered.

'A clod,' said Gottfried. 'Now out of here. The transport is on its way.'

The room had cleared and Simon backtracked to find Liz and Frank.

‘Where did you scarper to?’ asked a fretful Liz.

‘The cupboard. I had to. Traynor’s got Graz’s pistol now,’ he said softly. ‘How’s Frank?’

‘He’s in terrible shape,’ replied Liz. ‘I’ll get some water.’

She knelt over Frank bathing his head and Simon found a brandy bottle in the wines and spirits cupboard.

They gave him a tiny glass and he brightened up. He even reached for the bottle and took another nip.

‘Better,’ he sighed and settled back sleepily. Simon and Liz watched him doze away.

‘Liz,’ said Simon. ‘If we don’t find out about the papers... but we can’t now with Gottfried gone... he’s the only one who’d be able to tell us. We’ve mucked it up.’

‘Papers?’ Frank, suddenly waking, said brightly. ‘Papers. That’s what I’ve got to do. They’re up my jumper.’

Liz and Simon burst out laughing.

‘You mean?’ Liz said.

Frank patted his chest and a faint crinkle of paper came out from under his white vest.

‘The papers—these are really old Traynor’s papers?’ Liz stuttered. ‘Oh, Frank.’ She started to cry but Simon kicked her ankle.

‘Let’s get them out,’ said Simon and he reached down inside Frank’s vest. A wad of dog-eared notepaper and a few small diagrams pinned together emerged.

‘Are these from behind the skirting board in Commander Traynor’s office?’ Simon asked.

‘Yes,’ Frank answered. ‘He told me to bust up the machine but I knew the papers were just as important. Everyone knew about the secret cupboard in his office so I thought I’d better move them. I

waited till I'd got a moment, nicked them, and thought I'd put them back once the Germans pushed off.'

'They've gone. Let's put them back now,' Liz said. She could hardly speak.

I think there's some contact, said Jean. Yes, they're still in that small room... talking about the papers... they think they've failed... Liz is upset... now Frank's talking... Frank's saying he took the papers because everyone knew about the secret cupboard in your office, Mr Traynor... he was going to put them back once the Germans were gone... They're in another room now... it's an office... Frank is putting some papers, they're not very big, behind a panel in the skirting...

Frank scrambled to his feet and the three moved off to the CO's office. Frank thrust the papers behind the panel. He sat leaning against the wall rubbing his head. Liz and Simon stood looking down at him for a moment. Then Simon tugged her sleeve.

'We've got to go, Liz.'

'But he's still ill.'

'You know what happens. Commander Traynor finds him—he goes to hospital and...'

Liz completed it '...and one day he's my father.' She crouched down by Frank.

'I've got to go, Frank,' she said.

'Have a good trip, girly,' Frank said, and his head slumped down on his chest.

Liz and Simon reached the front door to see Gottfried and Traynor standing a few yards away. They hid in the blackout, crouching together.

Gottfried turned and looked uphill. A lamp flickered at the edge of the rise.

‘Come on,’ he said. ‘They’re waiting for us.’

‘Not for me, they aren’t,’ said the Commander.

Gottfried whipped round. Traynor’s pistol was aimed steadily at him. His own was trained on the Commander.

‘You fool,’ said Gottfried. ‘I came here in the cause of peace. But if this is how you want it, it’s war.’

The two men stood tense.

‘Why don’t you shoot, Gottfried? Just as one civilized scientist to another?’

But Gottfried was backing slowly uphill, Traynor intent on his departure.

‘Come on, Liz,’ whispered Simon. ‘Let’s slip out before he finds us.’

They tiptoed behind the sentry post and crouched waiting till they heard the transport start up. Traynor turned and ran through the door. Liz and Simon crept silently through the grass. The hole in the wire was easy. They had to search harder for the hole in the barrier.

‘Let’s go together,’ said Simon.

At The Bull, Jean sat listening but there was no more electronic noise travelling out from the ruins. She shivered and then hugged herself for warmth... ‘The cold,’ she said... ‘dear God, the cold...’

THE TIME OF THE ICE-BOX

20

THE COLD WAS EXCRUCIATING. It was the kind of cold neither Liz nor Simon had ever felt before; the kind that takes hold of you like iron fingers, and then squeezes and squeezes until you feel you must snap like a dry stick.

‘Simon, where are we?’ gasped Liz in horror. ‘What – what...’

She couldn’t finish her sentence. Simon for his part was equally unable to reply. His astonished gaze took in only a blinding plain of whiteness, rising somewhere beyond to stark crags that gleamed silver against a sky of velvet blue. It was neither day nor night as far as one could be sure, early nor late. Somehow there even seemed to be no *place*, properly speaking; just that huge sea of ice, stretching on interminably, and the terrible pressure on his body that he knew soon must crush him. Beside him, Liz was gulping for air.

‘What’s—what’s the matter?’ asked Simon.

‘Can’t—can’t breathe...’

Suddenly Liz slumped to her knees. ‘This won’t do,’ thought Simon rapidly, ‘we’ll die if we stay here. Wherever it is we’ve come to, the cold will kill us.’ He seized Liz by the arms, desperately trying to drag her to her feet and get her back to the time barrier and safety. But now the iron fingers were biting into his flesh. There was

such a stricture round his chest he felt his ribs must break. Liz slipped from his grasp to the cold ground, a dead weight now. Simon strove valiantly one last time to resist the terrible pressures, but in his heart understood it was useless. His legs gave way, too, and the sparkling, deadly ice came up to meet him. Just as he fell, Simon was aware of something odd and perhaps remarkable; but could not at that moment put a name to it or even know why it should have recommended itself to his attention.

In the lounge of The Bull, staring out through the window towards the old Naval Station, Jean Skinner suddenly gave a convulsive shudder. Traynor was at her side in a moment.

‘What is it?’ His voice was quiet and reassuring.

‘I’m not sure.’ Jean seemed confused. ‘Something—something different now. Oh, I can’t see! And...’

Her shuddering was now a violent shaking. She clung to the window ledge as though to steady herself then wrapped anxious arms about the upper part of her body. Her teeth chattered. Skinner raced over from the fireplace.

‘Jean, what’s wrong? Tell me!’

‘I don’t know, Frank!’ Jean’s voice was a frightened sob all at once. ‘But the cold... dear God, the cold...’

‘Get her to the fire,’ snapped Traynor.

‘But—’

‘Just do it, Skinner. How the devil do I know what’s going on? She says she’s cold, take her where it’s warm.’

He was back to the fireplace himself in a couple of strides, stoking up the loose embers to make a little blaze. Skinner got his arms around Jean, carried rather than led her to the sofa before the

grate. Her shuddering was no less violent, but she seemed now to be losing consciousness into the bargain; a sigh, no more than a release of breath before sleep, escaped her as she slipped from his arms and fell back on the cushions, her eyes dropping closed. She was still. The blood had drained from her face and she was the colour of snow.

‘But she’s quite warm!’ cried Skinner in astonishment, having felt her head and hands.

‘I see.’

‘And it’s a summer’s day.’

‘An *English* summer’s day,’ allowed Traynor reflectively, staring into the jumping flames. Then he turned to regard the silent woman sharply. ‘So what’s happened to Liz and Simon now, I wonder?’ he asked. ‘She’s sharing something with them, obviously.’

‘But I thought Liz and Simon were free of all that’, replied Skinner with a frown. ‘I thought they only had to get to the hole in the fence to be back in their own time.’

‘So did I, old boy, so did I.’ Traynor moved over to sit by Jean. ‘But in an area like this, it seems... one’s always learning. Well, she said it herself,’ he added quickly as Skinner glanced mistrust at him. ‘Something different, eh? Something different...’

Something different. Simon was aware that he was freezing, understood perfectly that he had lost the use of his limbs and could do little to remedy his situation. But in another part of himself he remained active and alert, if a trifle detached. It was all rather like a dream where you experience things but at the same time stand off and observe them. The odd and perhaps remarkable factor came back to him. Why yes, those slabs; one seems now they are *quite*

remarkable. Regular, symmetrical, about half a dozen of them close together out here in this winter wilderness, almost as though they had been carved from the ice—by man... And wait a minute—now something else. Something approaching. No, *somebody*. Yes, this is a man, it must be: in bulky clothes like a space suit, coming up on a motorized sled. I can hear its engine... Now he's stopping. Now he's getting off to inspect those slabs. What is it he's doing? Reading something. A gauge?... And now—hold on, now he's seen Liz and me, I think. Yes! He's coming over. I can't—I can't see his face properly... And I feel so tired. Sleepy as anything. Yes. I've read that about freezing to death somewhere. In the end, you don't suffer. You just—just drop off... to sleep...

'Alert the infirmary,' ordered Bukov, panting. 'Notify Doctor Joynton.'

'Of course, Doctor Bukov,' replied a bewildered Beth. 'But what on earth—'

'I don't know. Don't stand there asking stupid questions. There's another one outside.'

Beth could not clearly see the limp bundle the big Russian held in his arms. It seemed to be a young girl, but in the shy light of the entrance area it was impossible to tell. Beth turned smartly for the main body of the underground laboratory as Bukov hastily put his burden down on the integral foam bench and swung again for the pressurized door that would take him back out to the tunnel and ice field above. She heard the click of the catch as he replaced the protective headpiece of his thermal suit.

Beth hurried along the wide central corridor. She was happy working at the laboratory. A woman in her late twenties now, she felt she had at length found her true niche after a youth of uncertainty in

England. She enjoyed the sleek efficiency of the place; the softness underfoot and self-regulating air-conditioning; the lighting that attuned itself to the needs of the human eye and the myriad devices that made life a fulfilling experience rather than a drudgery. 'Devices', in fact, were most of the game to Beth. She was nothing if not in thrall to the Machine. Somewhere deep in her attitudes there was even a quality that could have borne the name of worship. With rather more briskness but the inner conviction of a pilgrim of old entering Canterbury, she turned into the huge computer room.

'Urgent video flash for Doctor Joynton,' she said.

'Shush,' replied Larry, the tousle-haired chief technician, 'but put it out.'

He grinned, indicating across the glowing area with his head. Farther over, as it were in the centre of a ring formed by a semicircle of giant computer bastions, a tall, thin man lay unconscious on a gleaming steel table. Terminals reached from his temples, thorax and wrists to the recesses of the computer, and a high-pitched humming sound, barely perceptible at first, indicated contact of a strange and novel order between man and human artefact. The thought ran across Beth's mind, as it had done on other occasions, that this was a technological Stonehenge and Professor Devereaux, the director of the laboratory, was both priest and victim.

'On brain link?' she whispered.

'Sorting out a few gremlins,' replied Larry. Then he turned his fresh grin on her. 'Use channel 4B, and then come and have supper with me. Honest, I never get the chance to talk to you these days. I'm off duty in ten minutes.'

'Sorry, Larry, but I'm busy all evening,' said Beth primly. There were times when Larry could quite ruin an atmosphere for her.

When Edith Joynton walked into the infirmary and saw Liz and Simon, she said, 'Dearie, dearie me,' and set to work with a will. For a mature woman of some bulk she moved with an extraordinary lightness and dexterity. When finally she had the two properly injected, under oxygen tents and being progressively restored to a normal temperature she said. 'Dearie, dearie me,' again, and looked suspiciously at Bukov.

'What's the matter?' asked the Russian, who had stayed to get the answers to some questions.

'Bukov,' inquired Edith in a hard, flattish tone, 'who are these kids? Why aren't they dead?'

'Dead, Doctor Joynton?'

'It's eighty below outside there, but they don't even have frostbite. Their lungs should be iced up, but they're breathing normally. And look at the queer way they're dressed. I tell you, there's something screwy going on here. Where did they come from, anyway? Was there a carrier drop scheduled for today?'

'Yes,' replied Bukov with a frown. 'But only for goods, not for persons. I was out picking up the supplies when I came across them.'

'Then they're out of the box, aren't they?' Edith's eyes returned darkly to the two motionless shapes obscured behind the plastic curtains. 'Ruddy little wonders, Bukov. Ruddy little wonders.'

Devereaux said, 'Ah, Beth.' He blinked awake, sat quickly up on the steel table. 'What about those new arrivals?'

'You—you know about them, sir?' It was always slightly uncanny to Beth, the way he could receive new information on brain link.

‘Their coming was noted by the area scanners and passed on.’ Devereaux detached the terminals from his body in a matter-of-fact fashion, assisted by Larry, who had hurried over the moment he seemed to stir. ‘But the information wasn’t quite clear. They seemed to be—young people.’

‘I don’t know about that, Director. All I know is that Doctor Bukov discovered them out there on the ice. Half dead, apparently.’

‘Well, well,’ replied Devereaux, more puzzled than surprised. ‘And *young* people.’

He rose from the table to his full height. Though his gaunt face and angular body gave him a certain distinction and presence, Morgan Devereaux could hardly have been called an attractive man. His age remained a permanent mystery to his underlings. Yet when he smiled—which was rarely—and when the faint burr of his American speech wove fantasies of the scientific future—which was not often enough—Beth had always felt inescapably drawn to him. But there was no warmth in eye or tongue at this moment. He looked coldly to Larry.

‘Larry,’ said Devereaux, ‘I checked that stop-off in the laboratory water supply you reported. Late last night, and lasting three minutes. The computer abnegates all responsibility. Human error.’

‘It’s impossible,’ protested Larry. ‘I made all my rounds as usual at 21:00 hours, and there was no evidence of malfunction.’

‘Human error,’ repeated Devereaux. ‘The last enemy in a technological world. You’d better watch it, Larry.’ He started for the door. ‘You may also find you made a minimal mistake in recording your pulse reading this morning.’

‘No, Director.’

‘The computer was quite explicit about it.’ Devereaux had paused to look back with hard eyes. ‘I’ve tried to tell staff members till I’m

blue these things need to be correct to the micro-decimal. It's the only way of ensuring everybody gets his accurate dose of HA57. So just watch it, Larry. Watch it.'

The Director went on out of the computer room and Beth followed, leaving Larry to his reflections.

Edith Joynton adjusted the oxygen-supply tap above Liz's bed and was about to move away when she heard a little moan and observed a stirring beneath the tent. She quickly neutralized the apparatus and bundled back the plastic. Liz's eyes slowly opened.

'Well, what do you know about that?' said Edith, staring at her. 'Girlie, I say it again—you're a ruddy little wonder.'

Liz could only gaze into the broad, motherly face in astonishment. Then she sat bolt upright, perfectly well but in a sudden panic. Edith placed a protective arm around her shoulders.

'Now take it easy,' she urged. 'You're all right—though I'd be the last to know why.'

'Where am I?' asked Liz, hearing the sound of her own voice.

'You're safe, I tell you. Safe in the ice-box.'

'Ice-box?'

Edith laughed. 'Well, that's what they call it. Where you were heading for, anyway. The International Institute for Biological Research. Okay?'

Now images crowded back into Liz's head. The Naval Station—the time barrier—the strange ice field and the terrible cold. She opened her mouth to say something, but a sound came from the bed next to her. Simon was waking up too. Edith hurried over, repeated the process of switching off the oxygen and stripping back the plastic. Liz knew she must speak at once.

‘We’re in the ice-box, Simon,’ she announced.

Simon blinked at her.

‘The *ice-box* ,’ Liz insisted meaningfully. ‘It’s what they call it. You remember. The International Institute—ah—’

‘—for Biological Research,’ completed Edith.

‘Yes.’

‘Oh,’ said Simon. ‘Oh yes, of course.’

Edith was unceremoniously examining him, twisting his head this way and that, prodding his arms and chest. ‘And no signs of ill-effects on him either,’ she muttered. ‘I call this the funniest thing I’ve struck.’ She sat down heavily at the foot of the bed, sighing. ‘So let’s have the whole story. I’m Doctor Joynton, you’re Simon and you’re —?’

‘Liz.’

‘Liz. And the two of you came in on the carrier, right? Only then you tried wandering off from the drop shelter. It was pretty silly—we don’t go for mystery hikes much about here. Funny we didn’t get the usual notification you were coming, though.’

‘Doctor Joynton,’ said Simon, more or less himself again, ‘what is this place, exactly? I mean, *where* is it?’

Edith Joynton looked faintly annoyed. ‘Sonny, if you’re a volunteer, you must have had a destination briefing,’ she replied.

‘I know!’ amended Simon. ‘But they didn’t tell us...’ He looked about him, depressed and still a bit light-headed. It was impossible not to ask the direct question. ‘Why is it so cold outside?’

‘Well, with the South Pole just down the road, what else do you expect?’ asked Edith, rising.

Liz gasped, and a choked gurgle beside her informed her that Simon, too, was smothering his reaction as best he could. Edith

beamed at them suddenly, unaware that she might have said anything to dismay.

‘You’ve had a fantastic escape, you know,’ she said. ‘You really might have had the sense to put on the protective clothing provided when the carrier dropped you. The Antarctic in winter isn’t Bondi Beach, my children.’

THE WIND SIGHED around the old buildings of the Naval Station; through broken windows and gaps in the crumbling stone; and across the empty field to where Commander Traynor stood by the broken wall with Frank and Jean Skinner. The sky was an even grey.

‘Well,’ announced Traynor bleakly, ‘no sign of them. But that doesn’t necessarily mean they haven’t come back through the barrier.’

‘Commander, if they had we’d have seen them at the inn by now,’ replied Skinner, deeply worried.

Traynor took no notice of him, but turned to Jean. ‘You’ve really lost all touch with them, have you, Mrs Skinner?’

‘I think so...’ Jean for her part was trying to tell herself everything was all right. ‘It was very peculiar. Just that awful feeling of cold after they’d reached the fence... then nothing.’

‘Cold. Yes.’ Traynor nodded.

Skinner said with a sudden asperity: ‘Look here, what on earth’s happened? You’re the one who was so anxious for the children to go back into the time bubble, Traynor, and you’re always making out you understand the theory. So what’s gone wrong? Are they in difficulty?’

‘More things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamed of in your philosophy,’ murmured Traynor, moving away a few paces.

‘What kind of answer is that?’ Skinner was after him in an instant, seizing his arm and twisting him back. ‘I want the truth! You needn’t play your games with me. We’ve already seen what that can lead to.’

‘For goodness sake, man, what do you take me for—the oracle of Delphi?’ Traynor snatched his arm away from the other, at once angered. ‘We’re dealing with indefinables here. From the sound of it, I’d say Liz and Simon had come through the barrier expecting to return to their own time—but finished up somewhere else instead.’

Skinner stared at him. ‘Well, that’s straight enough,’ he said in a flat voice. But he had plainly failed to find the *mot juste*. His eyes went to Jean, as did Traynor’s. Her silence was louder than tongues now, an inaudible cry.

‘We’d better go back to the inn and wait there, Mrs Skinner,’ said Traynor with unusual gentleness. ‘Nothing more to be done here.’

‘No—no, I expect that’s right,’ Jean responded. But the voice within called out: ‘Where, then? Where do I go to understand?’ And the sighing wind replied only that it was a grey summer’s day in an open field, and the children had been snatched from her vision: that her only daughter and the boy who was her companion were lost in time.

‘Very well,’ said Devereaux grimly. ‘Now we’ll get to the bottom of it.’

He jabbed various controls on the shining panel in front of him, and the lights of the room faded gently down, highlighting a pale-blue screen on the video bank opposite. ‘Director to computer,’ announced Devereaux. ‘Director to computer. Depth information concerning this afternoon’s arrivals. Priority operation. Commence.’

It was always an experience for Beth to be in the director's office. As a general rule, entry was forbidden except on business of extreme urgency, and as the Director kept very much to himself on other occasions, social calls seldom occurred. But today Devereaux had asked her to assist him in clearing up an anomaly. Here, she felt, here in this office was the very heart of the ice-box. The whole establishment was Devereaux's creation more than anyone else's, and here he fulfilled its purpose; together with the computer directing the experimentation in biology, laying down the pattern of research. And here too, she knew, were secrets. Beth had perhaps better reason than any of her colleagues to be aware of the room beyond this office, the room entered by a door without a handle. As to what happened there, she could not, of course, be any way certain: but just to know of its existence, and to understand how important it was to the Director, seemed a privilege in itself. In Beth's mind, all this was a part of the embracing sense of awe and wonder. If the computer in its monolithic efficiency appealed to her as a technological Stonehenge, then the private room was the Temple of the Unknown God.

There was a sharp chattering sound, and yellow captions ran brightly across the surface of the blue screen:

COMPUTER TO DIRECTOR... DETAIL FROM MEMORY BANK
JUNE 10TH 15:22 HOURS... NECESSARY PROCEED WITH
EXPERIMENT AB/494/Z... CENTRAL CONTROL CONTACTED RE
VOLUNTEERS... CHARACTERISTICS SPECIFIED... EXPECT
ARRIVAL SOONLIEST... ENDS...

The screen blacked out and Devereaux thumped a fist down on the panel before him. 'There, do you see?' he snapped. 'A complete briefing from the computer, plain as day and earmarked for action. "Expect arrival soonliest," it says. Must I attend to everything myself in this place?' Angry now, he jabbed at another set of controls, and a larger screen lit up, revealing Larry in the computer room at work on a piece of equipment. Larry looked up and moved into shot almost the moment his picture came clear. 'Yes, Director?'

'Reference computer memory bank, Larry, June 10th 15:22 hours,' Devereaux defined curtly. 'Scan immediately, and let me have your comments as soon as possible, please.'

'Oh,' rejoined Larry, oddly embarrassed. 'If that's about the new arrivals, Director—'

'Well?'

Larry tried the ghost of a grin. 'I did a bit of checking myself. We had no confirmation from Central Control that they'd actually got round to sending any volunteers. So I didn't think the June 10th instruction was to be considered operational.'

'If confirmation had been necessary, the computer would have *requested* it—don't you understand that, Larry?' Devereaux's eyes shone strangely all at once, and his voice rang metallic. 'I'm tired of explaining to people that I programme the computer to attend to things like this by itself.'

'Yes, Director.'

'Then get with it! Don't pit your wits against the computer's, man. You'll discover one day you haven't a chance.'

Again his fist thumped down on the control panel, and Larry's image wavered and vanished from the screen. Devereaux turned away with a gasp, trembling in his annoyance.

‘The human element, Beth,’ he said. ‘Sometimes I think the human element will frustrate everything I’m trying to do here.’

Beth was a little troubled. In her experience the Director was an unemotional man, accustomed for the most part to meet his successes without self-approbation and his difficulties with calm. But today he was plainly upset. He moved about his office with observable signs of irritation, then paused abruptly before the door to his private room; the door without a handle.

‘The computer, Beth,’ Dereveaux murmured. ‘Day after day I link to it, perfecting it, refining its operations. If I’m not prevented by fools, I’ll bring it to such a peak of efficiency that there’ll be nothing I can’t do.’

Beth said: ‘But you’ve achieved so much already. Director. You’ve no reason to feel depressed.’

‘Oh, the ice-box has long since justified its existence if that’s what you mean. Yes.’ Devereaux sighed now, something as it were weary about him. ‘But scientific experimentation is a road without an ending. We must push on. Our job is to remake the imperfect world. To advance the human species... beyond its understanding...’

In as much as these remarks seemed not to be addressed to her but to the door and whatever lay beyond it, Beth was not sure what reply to make or even if she should speak at all. But as she opened her mouth to say something anyway, Devereaux turned to regard her. His eyes were soft; again there had been a change of mood.

‘Beth.’

‘Yes, Director.’

What came next both startled and pleased her. It was not the kind of thing she had ever heard the Director say before. ‘Why is it I can talk to you, I wonder, Beth? Why is it only you seem to cause me no trouble... to understand?’

The clothes seemed odd. Or not odd, no that wasn't the word; just—well, different. Liz tried to whisper as much to Simon when she got the chance, but he didn't seem to understand. Edith Joynton was hardly allowing a word in edgeways, anyhow. Having officially 'discharged' them from the infirmary, she led Liz and Simon along the broad central corridor, all smiles and solicitude.

'What would you like first?' she asked. 'Just say, don't be afraid. A shower—something to eat—'

'Oh, I'm so hungry I could eat a horse,' replied Liz.

'Palamino or just plain old Cart?' snorted Edith, laughing at her own joke. Liz tittered obligingly, but Simon could only summon up a puzzled frown. Edith had directed them towards a brightly-coloured door which seemed to him to bear in embossed letters the legend: fantasy room.

'Ah yes,' said Edith wisely. 'You'll soon learn why it's called that, young feller-me-lad.'

'So,' smiled Bukov warmly as they entered, 'our orphans of the snows.' The Russian beamed up at them from a queer-looking chair that seemed effortlessly to take the shape of his body as he shifted, but at first they hardly noticed him for the room itself. Strange, apparently source-less, patterns of light played constantly on the walls, at once stimulating and entirely soothing; the fittings were all so much a part of the general shape and geography of the room that in being there, in being *features*, they seemed not to be evident at all; it was a defined space, it was nowhere, it was everywhere.

'We take it easy here after a hard day,' Edith explained.

She indicated. 'There, you can get any television programme on earth. Here, whatever you want of the world's Press. In those cubby-

holes, you can listen to music; it's just like being at a concert, and doesn't disturb other people either. And over this way—well, this is the device that gives the room its name...'

Leading them over a floor their feet seemed hardly to touch, she had brought them to a little alcove beyond which were two straight-backed rococo chairs. On the high arm of each rested an ornate pair of clamps, which in other circumstances Liz and Simon might have taken for old-style radio headphones. Edith grinned, picked up a pair of these. 'The fantasy apparatus,' she said.

Liz and Simon looked suitably blank, so she went on, her grin broadening. 'Well, you put these on—one terminal against each temple—and you get a straight brain link to the computer. Then the computer takes over your dream and makes it real.'

'Goodness,' said Liz, blinking.

'Want to try it?'

'Oh! I'm not sure—'

Edith laughed now. 'Oh, it's a pleasant experience. Like being in a film instead of just looking at it. I always go home in fantasy.'

'Where's home, Doctor Joynton?' asked Simon.

'Well... I come from New Zealand. We're quite an international community here, but I seem to miss the old places more than others... yes...'

Her eyes seemed suddenly very sad. On an impulse, she slipped the clamps on her head, moved from them and sat squarely on one of the chairs. She closed her eyes; then, without warning, went quite rigid. Her body was stiff for a moment, then just as abruptly went limp again and was entirely relaxed. So much and no more Liz and Simon observed. But as for Edith, she was in an instant back on that huge and much-loved sweep of sand at Waimarama, where the

coast turns north for Cape Kidnappers... hearing the crash of the eternal surf on the shore, the cry of the gannets as they circled...

A deep voice behind Simon said, 'You find it unusual?' Simon swung round. Bukov had come silently up and was watching his and Liz's reactions. 'I've never come across anything like it before,' Simon ventured.

'It's quite new.' His sheer size and the depth of his black eyes made him a formidable figure, but Bukov obviously only meant to be friendly. 'I'm Bukov, in case nobody told you. I found you out there on the ice. You're here for the AB experiment, are you?'

Simon paused. 'Yes,' he decided. 'Yes, that's right.'

It seemed the right answer. Bukov nodded. 'There'll be no action for a while. We come at things gently here. First of all they'll have to put you on HA57, and that takes a week or two in itself.'

'What's HA57?' asked Simon, curious now.

'You don't know about that yet?' Bukov grinned toothily. 'But of course—it's a secret outside the ice-box. Well, my boy—'

But the door to the room clicked open, and Beth came in. 'Ah,' she said, 'the new arrivals. I was wondering where they'd got to. The Director asked me to introduce them to the ice-box, and—'

But suddenly she stopped dead. Her eyes had fallen on Liz, and now she stared at her in a kind of unbelief. Turning to respond to a new presence, Liz met her gaze and was at once startled. There seemed to be in Beth's eyes an instant antipathy, almost a hatred.

'How dare you,' breathed Beth, for her alone. 'How dare you...'

Later, Liz was to ask Simon what on earth she could have meant by a remark like that, only to get from him an equally puzzled reaction. It was baffling, to say the least. Just that moment of—yes, the more Liz considered it, it could only have been hatred—and then no further mention of the matter. With a cold efficiency, Beth had

shown Liz and Simon the general layout of the ice-box, their sleeping quarters, and had finally taken them to the computer room, turning them over to Larry for a briefing session here. Then she had left them, glad to be finished with them, glad to be away.

‘...now this is where the daily dosage of HA57 is delivered,’ Larry was saying, indicating a particular trap in a computer bastion. ‘You feed in your vital statistics at the panel as I showed you, because it has to be freshly prescribed for each individual every morning according to changes in body temperature, pulse rate and so on.’

‘Look, what is this HA57,’ asked Simon, tired of playing along at length.

‘The longevity drug,’ said Larry simply.

Liz stared at him, her other little problem temporarily forgotten. ‘What did you say?’ she demanded.

‘Well, you know—longevity, long life. The drug stops the process of decay, so people who take it simply don’t grow any older.’

‘You mean—’ Simon was astonished. ‘They can live for ever?’

Larry gave a professional smirk. ‘Oh, I’ll have to have notice of that question,’ he replied. ‘But it’s certainly the biggest discovery the Director has made since the ice-box was founded. Take Doctor Joynton, now—how old would you say she was?’

‘Fifty,’ suggested Liz.

‘Actually, she’s more like a hundred.’

Liz and Simon were goggling now. Larry laughed aloud at their reaction, moved away. ‘You see, what we do in the ice-box is to test out new biological techniques until we’re sure they’re safe for release to the world at large,’ he explained. ‘There can be side-effects often enough. We have to find out about that.’

Simon discovered his voice again. ‘But the things you’re doing...’ he began. ‘Well—they’re way ahead, aren’t they? I mean, the world

at large doesn't even know a thing like a longevity drug is possible.'

'Just as well it doesn't,' Larry assented soberly. 'Look at that business of brain-computer links. People were going about it the wrong way and doing themselves a lot of harm until we perfected a system in 1986.'

Liz's mouth dropped open a good inch and a half. 'Perfected... *when?*'

'1986,' repeated Larry, unaware of their alarm. 'Just four years ago this month, as it happens. July, 1986.'

It was easy enough getting to the entrance area without being detected, rather more difficult finding the thermal suits. But they turned out to be hung up in a cupboard, just like overcoats. 'We've got to get out of here, Liz,' muttered Simon, clambering into the awkward garment. 'Somehow or other we've slipped into a future time, and we're certainly not sticking around to be part of some experiment or other. They think we're a couple of guinea pigs!'

'I don't understand it,' moaned Liz, upset about a number of things and having more trouble with her suit than Simon. 'Will the time barrier still be there?'

'At least we won't freeze over again.'

Simon got the pressurized door open, and started out into the tunnel. 'Hurry up,' he called softly back, fitting on his headpiece as he went. 'We don't want to be seen.'

The catches were stiff, and Liz's fingers couldn't quite do up the final clasps. She gave a little sob. And then two things happened: in which order precisely she could never afterwards be completely sure. A lift door farther over slid across and Bukov emerged, stopping in his tracks to stare at her in astonishment. And the door to

a kind of side room opened, and a woman came out. A woman who was at once familiar to Liz: a woman who looked for all the world like her mother, Jean.

‘LIZ, FOR GOODNESS SAKE, COME ON!’ Simon dashed back through the pressurized door, aware of alien shapes in the entrance area, aware of danger. He grabbed Liz’s hand.

‘But, Simon—’

Waiting for nothing, Simon thrust a headpiece over her head, and hauled her bodily for the tunnel and the ice field beyond.

‘Stop!’ roared Bukov, suddenly coming to life. ‘You mustn’t go out there. Come back!’

He dashed for the cupboard himself, wrenching out a thermal suit and climbing rapidly into it. And the woman who looked for all the world like Liz’s mother, Jean, simply stared; uncertain, bewildered, visibly shaken. Her hand went to her head. It was as though she might drop in a dead faint.

Bukov got his suit and headpiece on, and dashed after the now vanished Liz and Simon. It was an effort running up the slope to the outer atmosphere, particularly with the bulk of the suit to impede his movements, but the big Russian stormed out the ice-encrusted entrance to the tunnel to see his fugitives only some yards away, over by the symmetrical slabs. He started at once towards them, but in his haste slipped and fell; heavily perhaps he subsequently

thought, because for a moment—or what then seemed but a moment—there was blackness; and seconds later, when he dragged himself to his feet again, the two children seemed to have vanished from sight. Bukov couldn't understand it. The cold slabs, the vast ice field, the peaks rising to velvet blue beyond, but of those he sought, no physical sign. He made a routine check, turned for the tunnel entrance again. What he didn't see was a little bundle composed of two thermal suits, hastily bunched together and concealed behind the foremost slab by Simon, as he and Liz had found the comforting hole in the barrier, divested themselves of their encumbrances, and pushed through.

Liz sat where she had fallen in the Ministry field, nursing a bruised knee and crying lightly. Simon was clambering to his feet, jubilant.

'It's all right, Liz!' he cried. 'We've come back to our own time.'

'Yes,' sniffled Liz.

Simon frowned at her. 'What's the matter?'

'Oh, Simon, you don't understand... I saw Mummy in that place.'

'You... *what* ?'

'I did! Just as you ran out into the tunnel and Doctor Bukov arrived in the lift—well, another door opened, and this woman came out. Mummy.'

'You're cracked!'

'No...'

Liz sniffled afresh, deeply confused and upset. Simon moved to her, bending down. 'Look—that's not possible, Liz.'

'Mummy being in there? Why not?'

'Well, it was the future, we found out. 1990.'

'I know.'

‘And this is *now*. So you must have made a mistake.’

‘I didn’t.’ The more Simon pointed out the idiocy of the proposition, the more Liz felt obliged to adhere to it. ‘It was Mummy...’

Simon sighed. It all seemed much more than he should be asked to bear under the circumstances, but he supposed in some part of himself that people who got mixed up with girls like Liz just had to learn to expect such things. He raised the damp female before him to her feet. ‘Don’t cry,’ he encouraged. ‘Crying’s weak-minded. It’s all a bit weird I know, but we’ll find the answer somehow. We’ll try, anyway.’

‘All right, Simon.’ Liz made an effort and controlled her tears. ‘Thank you,’ she added. ‘You’re so nice to me.’

‘I’m not,’ retorted Simon immediately.

‘Yes you are.’

‘I’m not! What makes you say a stupid thing like that?’

‘Because it’s true.’ She was looking earnestly at him now, and in spite of himself he was forced to notice how gentle and brown her eyes were. ‘Oh, I know, you like to pretend you’re wet, but you’re not when it comes down to it. Not really at all...’

Simon decided he didn’t like the trend of this conversation at any price. He rallied his forces to restore things to their normal safe and practical plane, and might have succeeded in doing so, except that at this moment Liz again burst into tears and buried her head in his shoulder.

‘It was just such a shock, Simon,’ she sobbed. ‘Such a shock seeing Mummy in a place like that...’

While appreciating that the whole situation was fatheaded, wrong and a waste of time, Simon grudgingly had to admit to himself that

having a girl crying on your shoulder can sometimes afford curious and novel sensations.

‘...I don’t know whether to believe you or not,’ grunted Frank Skinner, pacing the lounge of The Bull in doubtful mood. ‘Honest I don’t.’

Liz sat close to Jean on the sofa, her mother’s arms around her. Simon was farther over, alone, and Traynor stood at the window, brooding out over the grey-green countryside.

‘Well, it’s true, Daddy,’ replied Liz. ‘We went into the future—1990. There was this place they called the ice-box, and they were doing all sorts of queer scientific experiments there.’

‘Oh, not queer, Liz,’ corrected Simon. ‘Just...’ But then he seemed lost for the word himself.

‘Advanced, Simon?’ Traynor had turned back from the window, eyeing him carefully.

‘Yes, Commander. For one thing they told us they’d perfected brain-computer links—that was in 1986. Well, at the moment brain-computer links aren’t even properly talked about in science, are they?’

Traynor puckered his brows, made very thoughtful by this. Skinner stopped in his motion around the room.

‘But how do people go into the future, exactly?’ he asked. ‘How is it managed?’

‘And you say I was there, Liz dear?’ Jean was speaking now.

‘Yes, Mummy.’

‘In this—ice-box in the Antarctic.’

‘Yes, I’m certain of it!’

‘Darling, why? And was I alone? What about your father?’

‘Traynor.’ His face set suddenly, Skinner strode over to confront the other man. ‘I simply ask—how do people go into the future? When you explained about the children going into the past, you said it was because energy had been released and was still around to trigger off their hallucinations. But you can’t say that about the future. The future hasn’t happened yet.’

‘No, that’s true,’ agreed Traynor. ‘So probably we’d have to talk in terms of—possible energy, wouldn’t we?’

‘Possible energy?’ Skinner seemed confused.

‘Possible or potential. Energy that was *going* to be released some day—in the future.’

‘But that doesn’t make sense.’

‘Doesn’t it?’

‘No!’ Skinner’s tone was scathing. ‘How does energy that doesn’t even exist yet have an effect on people living in the present day?’

‘Oh, the energy’s always the same,’ replied Traynor mildly. ‘Yes. It’s simply put to different uses at different times.’ And it was on the tip of his tongue to repeat ‘More things in heaven and earth, Horatio’, but he thought better of that and merely added brightly: ‘Anyway, the fact that the children went into the future at least explains why Mrs Skinner lost touch with them.’

‘I don’t see that,’ said Jean.

‘Well, you’re a telepath. That means you can communicate with other minds—but in your own time, or a time that’s known to you, like 1940. To communicate with other minds in the future, you’d probably have to have a different kind of gift... the thing that’s called second sight.’

His expression was bland enough, but somewhere in the words there seemed to be an odd little menace, which carried over to Liz. She gave a quick shiver. Jean hugged her tightly.

‘What scrapes you two get into!’ she exclaimed cheerfully. ‘But I really don’t understand how I could be in this ice-box in the year 1990. Goodness, I’d be a very old lady by then.’

‘No, Mummy,’ replied Liz, ‘that’s the funny thing. You looked just as you look now.’

‘Well, that would be the effect of HA57,’ Simon said.

‘Of what?’ Traynor’s tone was suddenly intrigued.

‘HA57. That’s a longevity drug they told us they’d been developing there. It means you don’t age.’

The three adults stared at him blankly a moment. Then Skinner gave a loud laugh, cutting away again. ‘He’s barmy!’ he announced. ‘If that boy was a couple of years older, I’d say he’d been on the bottle.’

‘That’s what they told us, Mr Skinner!’ Simon insisted. ‘A drug that stopped people getting any older. It was worked out by the Director of the place, a man called Devereaux.’

‘What was his Christian name?’ asked Traynor with shrewd interest.

‘Morgan,’ replied Simon, who up till that moment might not have been certain that he actually knew. ‘Yes—Morgan C Devereaux, Director of Experimentation. I saw the plate on his office door.’

Traynor’s gaze intensified. Suddenly Simon was uncomfortable under the scrutiny. There were things about Commander Traynor, he began to realize, that had the power to disconcert him; and more than that, to make him mistrustful. It is always so in life with people you become closely associated with, only to discover when the relationship has reached certain proportions, that you have never really known them. Skinner was saying somewhere:

‘Well, it’s all very peculiar. But thank the Lord, we don’t have to be fussed with it. We’re going home now. The holiday is over. We’re

finished with St Oswald. With past and future... time barriers...'

Simon heard these remarks as though from a distance, and gave to them a correspondingly remote assent. The penetrating eyes across the room still pryed into him, as though he were a book, an ancient manuscript but recently come to light; in which might be read strange secrets, and mysteries unravelled since the foundation of the world.

Home to Liz was an ordinary little house in an ordinary little street. Her parents had acquired a bungalow on the reasonably up-to-date Wilmott Estate, where at least some houses were different from others, and she had been brought up to believe there was a virtue in being completely detached. Home for Simon, of course, was elsewhere, but as his father was still occupied on business in other parts, it had been arranged that he should spend the rest of the time before he went back to school with the Skinners. Very few days on the Wilmott Estate had passed before Simon began to doubt the wisdom of this provision. Liz was moody, uncommunicative and a burden to him. It never crossed Simon's mind that he might have appeared exactly the same to her. They had not precisely been forbidden to talk about the time barrier and their strange adventures, but Skinner, in a fatherly chat the night before he returned to his work, had given them a pretty clear indication that they would be better off to occupy their minds with other considerations. Dismayed by what he had learned about himself and 1940, Liz's father was plainly disenchanted with the whole 'scene', and wished his daughter in particular to have no more to do with it. That much at least was beyond question. One morning over breakfast, Simon thus attempted:

‘How about the pictures today, Liz? I looked up the paper and there’s a couple of good ones at the Classic. Renoir’s *La Grande Illusion*, and another by Jean Luc Godard—’

‘Films in *French*,’ groaned Liz. ‘And with you—?’

It was the red rag to the bull. ‘Now look,’ said Simon hotly. ‘I’ve done everything I know to be nice to you. I’m blowed if I know why, but I have. When we came back through the barrier, you said I was kind to you, and so I ruddy well am—’

‘Never mind what I said when we came back through the barrier!’ snapped Liz.

‘Why not? Didn’t you mean it? I hope you didn’t, because I’m sick of all this, I don’t mind telling you. Sick of going off into other times, sick of always being treated like an idiot. Sick of *you*.’

Liz snorted loudly, bashing a boiled egg with a spoon, and so matters stood when the doorbell rang.

It was Commander Traynor.

‘Goodness,’ cried Jean in apprehension, having gone to answer the summons in her apron. ‘My husband’s gone to work. I didn’t know—’

‘That’s all right, Mrs Skinner. I only wanted a word with the children.’

‘I’m not sure he’d permit that. He was saying only the other night —’

‘Do I smell coffee?’ inquired Traynor, sniffing the air. ‘How very kind of you. I came straight up from London first thing.’

Jean was still trying to restrain him when he marched straight into the kitchen and beamed expansively at Liz and Simon.

‘I know what you want,’ said Jean suddenly. ‘You want the children to go back into the bubble, to find out more about the ice-

box. Isn't that right? But they're not going. My husband has forbidden it.'

'The children can't come to any harm,' replied Traynor mildly. 'And you, Mrs Skinner—surely you must be anxious to know what on earth you could be doing in a research establishment at the South Pole at some time in the future. As anxious as Liz is, perhaps...'

Jean looked quickly to her daughter. She was used now to this kind of suborning tactic from Traynor, and able to see that it could still have its effect. Her expression hardened.

'That's unfair,' she said crisply. 'Of course there are mysteries. But we're not concerned in them any more—can't you understand that?'

'Your loyalty to your husband is very touching.'

'It's nothing to do with Frank!' He was annoying her now, and she disliked him for it. 'I thought the whole thing over for myself and came to the same conclusion. It's a simple matter of making up one's mind.'

'No, it isn't,' replied Traynor. 'It's a matter of making up several minds. Simon's as well as anyone else's.'

'Simon? What about Simon?'

Traynor transferred his gaze to the other. 'Well, my boy? You're a scientist at heart, you know it. That longevity drug, eh? All sorts of intriguing developments...'

The voice was one thing, but those eyes were quite another. Again Simon felt the look going right through him, opening him out as it were; and had to admit that what was perceived was a kind of truth. But Jean had stood about enough.

'Commander,' she said formally, 'I'll have to ask you to leave now. You're no right to talk to the children like this. You only want them to go back because they can find out things that would be of use to

you. The secret of the longevity drug, say—it would be a real feather in your cap if you could get hold of that and claim it as your own.’ Traynor had the good grace to be stung by this, which gratified her. ‘We’re busy here of a morning, and I’m sure you must have a full day ahead. Don’t let us detain you. Come, Liz.’ She moved for the door, then stopped again. ‘Liz,’ she commanded.

‘Yes, Mummy.’

She had seemed in two minds for a moment; but now, with a little sigh, rose from the table and followed her mother out of the room. Simon gave it a moment, then got up to go too.

‘It won’t do, you know, Simon,’ Traynor said gently.

Simon paused. ‘Oh, I don’t know, sir.’

‘You surprise me.’ Traynor laughed suddenly. ‘I took it for granted you’d be on my side.’

‘No. No, I don’t think I’m on anyone’s side. I’m just—not sure. I didn’t like the ice-box. It was a creepy sort of place.’

‘Ah,’ said Traynor. Then, rather surprisingly: ‘Come to think of it, that’s probably just about the right word for it. Creepy.’

Simon didn’t understand what he meant, and could only frown. Traynor’s expression was oddly calculating now.

‘Morgan C Devereaux,’ he said, ‘the Director of the icebox. You’re sure you’ve got the name right?’

‘It was the one I saw on the door.’

Traynor nodded. ‘Now that’s very interesting. Morgan C Devereaux has been the world’s leading authority on biology for a number of years now.’

‘You mean—in our time?’

‘Yes.’

Simon saw it. ‘Well—he invented HA57. So I suppose after he’d done that, he dosed himself first off.’

‘Quite. But I wonder how?’ Traynor’s voice abruptly had a little edge to it, and the eyes bored into Simon again. ‘You see, old chap, in June of last year—Morgan C Devereaux died... Oh, no doubt about it,’ he added in answer to Simon’s astonishment. ‘He was an old friend. I attended his funeral.’

‘THE SCIENTIFIC ICE-BOX,’ Traynor murmured reflectively, his crisp hair disturbed by the strong wind. ‘Yes, it makes sense. A place apart, eh Simon, where new techniques could be tried out, new developments initiated. A place constructed around the progress of science. And a major scientist in charge—to direct the experimentation...’

It was even bleaker than usual in the Ministry field at St Oswald. Simon wondered as he took the cold air in the face if perhaps it was ever really fine here; or if, perhaps, in some way neither he nor anyone else understood, the place was permanently rendered chill by that ice field a generation away in time, but mere yards across the rank grass in space. Traynor’s voice came again:

‘Well, Simon? Sure in your mind?’

‘Yes, Commander. Quite sure.’

‘The Skinners will raise holy hell, you know. I’ll be in terrible trouble. Could even finish up in jug on an abduction charge.’

Simon had no time for these whimsicalities. He had made up his mind to go back to the ice-box because the mysteries were now too compelling for his inquiring mind to resist; and because—though he was far less ready to admit it to himself—he was annoyed at Liz for being fed up with him, and felt the need of some larger cause or

concern to absorb his impatience. Liz, he had finally decided, was an inconsistent person, unhappily capable of saying one thing one minute and then quite the opposite the next. He had heard, however, that even when women say the same thing all along, they generally *mean* the opposite, so perhaps it was no reliable analysis. The fact simply remained that he was *going*, and it was a solemn moment.

‘Good luck,’ said Traynor. ‘Come back with all you can find out, and we’ll all be proud of you.’

So there was little attempt in the end to dissimulate; Simon understood now that Liz’s mother had been right about Traynor. But he took the proffered hand and grasped it firmly.

‘Thank you, sir.’

‘See you in jail.’

Simon moved forward in the field, groping for the barrier. This part of the operation never failed to intrigue Traynor. He watched with taut interest as the boy before him found the wall that could not be seen and felt carefully along it until at length he came to the hole that wasn’t there; then bent to it, struggled a little—and disappeared from view.

Traynor slapped one fist loudly into the other. In his eyes there was now a sharp gleam of triumph.

You did *what?*’ demanded Frank Skinner incredulously, ‘You took him back to St Oswald and let him go into the time bubble—in spite of what I said?’

Having succeeded in the battlefield, Traynor was determined now to win around the conference table. The victor can afford to be generous. He embraced the angry Skinner, Liz and an outraged Jean with the one pacific smile.

‘Look here, let’s not get in a state about this,’ he urged. ‘I had very little to do with it. The boy virtually insisted.’

‘I don’t believe you,’ said Jean flatly.

‘Dear Mrs Skinner...’

‘I don’t! Simon wouldn’t do a thing like that without telling me unless you’d put pressure on him. Oh, I should never have left the two of you alone.’

‘I must clear up certain misapprehensions,’ said Traynor, clearing his throat. ‘My name is not Svengali, and I don’t go around making a practice of leading young people astray. On the contrary, I’m only interested in finding out what people want to do themselves. Simon has an inquiring mind, don’t you realize that? He *needs* to know the answers to puzzling questions. Right, Liz?’

They all looked to Liz suddenly, silent and at this moment a curiously small figure in the big armchair across the room.

‘What—?’

I say, doesn’t Simon fret and fret till he’s found the solution to a vexing problem?’

‘Oh yes,’ replied Liz absently. ‘Yes, he never stops trying to work things out.’

Jean was puzzled by her daughter’s apparent preoccupation, but now Skinner had drawn himself up and was saying, ‘Anyway, the simple fact is, this time you’ve gone too far, Commander. I’m not standing for it any longer. I’m going for the police.’

‘Is that wise?’ inquired Traynor politely as the other started for the door.

‘Stop me if you think not,’ invited Skinner.

‘I was only thinking of how your complaint might sound to the official ear. You mean to charge me with having kidnapped a member of your household and somehow projected him into the

future. You mean to report that a young boy has gone missing, but isn't likely to be found because he's in the year 1990...' Skinner had stopped in his progress, reached by this. Now Traynor's face took on a subtly harder line. 'If any such hare-brained notions were put to me, of course, I should deny them outright. Suggest the whole thing was a fabrication on your part... the unhappy result of a war injury.'

Jean gasped, leaping to her feet from the sofa. 'Commander Traynor, I've always known you were a ruthless man—'

'Oh, forget it, Jean,' growled Skinner.

'No, Frank! He doesn't care who he hurts as long as he gets his own way. He'd kill someone if he had to. It's time he knew what we think of him.'

'And what about Simon?' cried Liz all at once. 'What about *Simon*? You stand there talking, arguing—but it's Simon we ought to be thinking about! He's back there. In that awful place...'

She had risen to her feet, and now turned and ran from the room with a little sob. Skinner was bewildered.

'Liz—'

Jean was already halfway to the door, but he stopped her, sensing in some part of him that perhaps he ought to go himself. Jean did not prevent him, so he ran out after Liz, leaving her with Traynor. The Commander met her eyes coolly.

'That place,' he murmured, 'whatever it may be—whoever it may one day claim...'

'Liz, sweetheart, what's up?' asked a concerned Skinner, coming into the kitchen.

She was sitting at the table, her head on her arms, weeping copiously. Skinner sighed, drew a white handkerchief from his pocket and offered it to her.

‘I’m not crying,’ protested Liz. ‘It’s nothing really. Simon can go where he wants, can’t he? Anywhere.’

‘Liz.’ Skinner scraped a chair back and sat down. ‘Now look, let’s get this straight. The only reason I didn’t want the two of you to go back is because I thought we’d all had enough of it. Also, because it could still be dangerous.’

‘But it isn’t, is it? Mr Traynor says we can’t come to any harm.’

‘Traynor says all sorts of things.’

‘But Mummy’s there, isn’t she?’

Skinner resisted impatience. ‘Your mother. Oh, Liz, do you really believe that’s so?’

‘I saw her,’ cried Liz. Her tears started again. ‘And Simon—Simon can be a fool at times. Oh, he studies a lot and knows all kinds of things nobody else would ever want to know, but he’s not much good at looking after himself. Last time—last time he depended on me a lot...’

Skinner took all this in, then nodded soberly. It was curious, he had cause to remember afterwards, what a sinking feeling it gave him. ‘I see,’ he said ruefully. ‘So the world changes, and little girls at last become big girls.’

‘No—’ denied Liz.

‘Oh, it’s a fact. Yes. So this is something we’ve got to talk about, isn’t it... whether we like it or not.’

He smiled at her, a smile that was at once melancholy and generous, and Liz smiled back through the last of her tears; glad in her heart that she had him for a father, and wondering why she had never thought as much before.

So it was agreed that Liz too should go back through the barrier; so another pilgrimage was made to the Ministry field at St Oswald; so Jean and Frank watched as their daughter found a solidity in the empty air, then a space, and vanished even as they stared—wondering to the last whether or not they had made a wise decision.

Liz grabbed at the remaining thermal suit beside the slab of ice, and scrambled into it as needles of the intense cold pricked at her. Simon's suit was already gone. She set out clumsily for the tunnel entrance, a dogged but incongruous figure against those icy wastes.

She had little trouble getting down the slope of the tunnel or through the pressurized door that sealed the ice-box off from the unfriendly world outside. But it was just as she reached the entrance area that she had to skitter and hide behind a convenient wall pillar; Bukov and Edith emerged from the corridor, making for the lift to the private apartments above.

'...I don't understand it,' Bukov was saying impatiently. 'Liz seems simply to have disappeared, and all the boy Simon will say is that he's been for a walk. Been for a walk! '

'Yes,' replied Edith in her flat tone. 'It's funny, isn't it?'

'It's more than funny. They're really a most unusual pair of volunteers. I wasn't dreaming, Edith, they just vanished into thin air out there on the ice...'

The lift door obscured them from view, and Liz thought to herself, 'Well, that's all right.' She and Simon had been with her parents for over a week, but here time seemed to have stood still. Liz slipped off the thermal suit—it was much easier to get out of than to put on—and restored it to the cupboard. She turned in the direction of the corridor; but then her eye fell on the door to the side room—the door

beyond which she had seen the woman who appeared to be her mother, Jean.

Liz bit her lip. All at once, this was not easy for her. At home, with her mother beside her, it had seemed quite clear. She had *seen* Jean in the ice-box. But now, in the precincts themselves, it seemed suddenly less sure, or at any rate too mysterious a business to investigate alone. But precisely as one part of her held her back, so another urged her on. Liz crossed to the silent door, stopped in front of it. Her hand went out to the catch, paused. Then, summoning up all her courage, she opened the door and went inside.

The Director said, seated behind his desk, 'I take a most serious view of all this, Simon. I want you to understand. Most serious.'

'Yes, sir.' Simon was standing opposite him, literally on the carpet, and feeling exactly as though he were at school getting it hot and strong from the Head.

'You came here as a volunteer,' Devereaux went on. 'Well, we don't have rules in an establishment like this. But we expect from everyone involved a gravity of purpose and sense of dedication. We serve science. Check?'

'Check, sir,' echoed Simon.

'Now as to your companion.' Devereaux turned to the panel, within arm's reach as he sat, and punched some controls. The lights dimmed, and the blue screen became more pronounced. 'Director to computer,' he snapped. 'Field report on search for missing volunteer. Beam curve and radar check.'

There was a moment's turbulence on the screen, and then the bright legend chattered across:

COMPUTER TO DIRECTOR... JULY 7TH 11:13 HOURS... NO INTERFERENCE RECORDED RADAR AREA... BEAM CURVE CHECK NEGATIVE... INCREASING RANGE AND POWER... ENDS...

Devereaux grunted in displeasure, snapped the screen off again. 'I sincerely hope we're not put in the position of having to request another volunteer,' he remarked. 'We should be beginning on the AB experiment almost at once.'

Simon cleared his throat and said: 'I'd like to say how privileged I feel to be here, sir. I've admired your work for a long time.' He became aware the Director was staring at him. 'Your work, sir,' he repeated. 'I think it's terrific.'

'What the devil would a kid like you know about my work?' asked Devereaux, astonished.

Simon was now not at all sure he'd chosen the right ploy. 'I read everything I can about science,' he hurried on. 'I first got interested through reading—uh—Charles Traynor.'

'Traynor? Who's Traynor?'

Now Simon was thrown. 'Well, *you* ought to know.'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean you must. He said—he was at...' Simon swallowed helplessly. 'Wasn't he a friend of yours?'

Devereaux's brow creased in annoyance. 'We have important work to do here, young man. If you wish to babble on about obscure and unimportant men of science, then you may do so in your leisure period. But not now. My time is valuable. We'll take another check.'

Simon was deeply reflective as the Director turned again for the panel.

There was nothing in the little room. It seemed poky and almost painfully plain. The contrived lighting had the general effect of subduing angles and smoothing out corners, but as far as Liz could see there was only a functional chair and a table, on which lay a pile of notes. And then something on a tiny shelf farther over took her eye; something in itself very small. She moved across and discovered it was a yellowing photograph in a frame. Then with a shock of surprise, she recognized that one of the two persons in the picture was herself—as a child in her mother's arms. 'It *is* Mummy,' she breathed.

A little noise behind her made her turn. The woman had entered the room.

'Mummy!' cried Liz.

The woman stopped dead, looking into Liz's face. Then with a stifled scream she shrank back against the wall.

'Mummy? Mummy, what's wrong? It's me—Liz.'

She hastened across. But Jean—for Jean it now clearly was—shrank even farther back. 'No! No, don't come near me. You're not real! You can't be...'

Liz now felt herself at a loss. Jean stared a moment longer, then slowly extended a hand. She touched Liz, satisfied herself she was really there. But the intelligence only seemed to upset her more. Jean moaned as though in pain, swayed visibly. Liz rushed to her.

'Oh, Mummy, don't! It's all right. It's only me.'

'I thought—I thought I saw you before at the door...' Jean's voice was a weak whisper. 'But I told myself I'd imagined it.'

‘We came through the time barrier,’ Liz explained. ‘Simon and me.’

‘Simon? Simon Randall?’

‘Yes.’ Jean seemed still so unsteady that Liz took her by the arm, leading her to the chair and sitting her down. ‘You remember how we used to be able to go in and out of the time barrier? Well—this time it’s brought us here.’

‘Not *here*,’ said Jean hopelessly. ‘No, it’s not possible.’

Liz regarded her mother with concern, not sure of anything now. Abruptly the door pushed open again, and someone else entered the room. It was Beth, the cold young woman who had behaved so strangely to Liz before.

‘Jean,’ announced Beth, ‘the Director asked me to see you about —’ But then she too saw Liz, and gasped audibly. She rushed over to her, seizing her roughly by the arm. ‘What are you *doing* here?’ she demanded in sudden passion. ‘I thought you’d gone away.’

Liz struggled against the hard grip, which bit into her flesh. ‘Don’t hurt her,’ cried Jean.

‘I don’t want her here, Jean. She had no right to come!’

‘Leave her alone!’ Jean stood now, in possession of herself again and determined. ‘It’s not her fault. She came through the time barrier. Just as you were able to—once.’

Liz stopped struggling abruptly. Her eyes went to Jean, then back to Beth again. Something hard and implacable gazed out at her; but, she knew in that instant, something familiar too. Jean nodded weakly, feeling for her shock and alarm.

‘Yes, Liz,’ she said gently, ‘Try and understand. Beth is you. You when grown up. You’re one and the same person. Two people... but each of you my only daughter. It’s the trick the time barrier has played on us.’

Liz's immediate reaction was to want to scream. It was like something in a nightmare, where the devil that pursues you turns into someone familiar but no longer reassuring, then into your own reflection in a mirror.

'This... is me?' she asked incredulously.

'Yes, Liz,' replied Jean.

'But—but how—'

'It doesn't matter how,' snapped Beth. 'What do you mean by coming here? We've no use for you—don't you realize that?'

'Simon and I were just trying to get home from the Naval Station,' Liz said helplessly. 'But when we came through the barrier—'

'Oh, those ridiculous tricks with time! That absurd barrier!' Beth cut away from the two of them, caught up in a quick rage. 'Childish—immature! How long will it be before I've finally outgrown it all?'

She paused a moment to recover herself, closing her eyes and putting long fingers to her temples. In the silence, Liz looked to Jean. She was still badly shaken and could have done with some consolation from the woman who, however things had altered, remained her mother. But Jean only looked confused and a little afraid. Beth swung back on them.

‘Now listen to me, Liz,’ she said in a more even tone. ‘People change. At a certain time in my life I had to take some important decisions. Break with the past and become a different kind of person.’

‘But why?’ Liz wanted to know.

‘Because I was a little idiot when I was you.’ She was obviously finding it an effort to keep the passion out of her voice. ‘I had to do something about forcing myself to grow up. I needed to find a purpose to my existence. We can’t stay fools all our lives.’

Jean said, grasping her hand: ‘Liz, you’ve got to appreciate how much things have changed for us in the past few years. How very much. Beth wanted to come here to the icebox in 1980. Just about then, we lost our home—’

‘What?’ cried Liz. ‘How did that happen?’

‘We won’t talk about it now... I was able to come with Beth because I’m a telepath, and the Director was interested in having some experiments done in that field. So that’s how I live now. Experimenting with telepathy, while the others experiment with physics and biology.’

Liz frowned. ‘And Daddy?’ she asked suddenly. ‘Is he here too? In the ice-box?’

Across from her, Beth stiffened perceptibly; and Liz was able again to observe the frightened look in her mother’s eyes. But before she had time to ask more, Beth said crisply; ‘The simple question is, what’s to be done? You obviously shouldn’t be in this time-phase at all.’

‘He *is* here, then?’ Liz insisted.

‘But there may be more to it than meets the eye.’ Beth was ignoring her powerfully now. ‘I’ll have to make inquiries.’

Jean seemed surprised. 'What inquiries? Liz and Simon just happened to come through the time barrier, exactly as she says.'

'You really think it's as simple as that?' There was all at once something remote and even faintly patronizing about Beth as she turned cold eyes on Jean. 'It might interest you to know the computer has identified Liz and Simon as the volunteers for the AB experiment,' she said with due gravity. 'Now that's a very odd situation—wouldn't you say? The computer doesn't make mistakes.' The observation seemed to bother Jean as much as it perplexed Liz. Beth turned on her heel for the door. 'Keep an eye on her,' she commanded.

'Why did she change her name to Beth?' Liz asked quickly.

'Liz was childish and—' Beth had swung back, at once involved again.

'I was asking Mummy!'

'Oh, Liz,' sighed Jean, quite at a loss. 'She just wanted to be different. In so many ways.'

'Anyway, I don't know anything about being a volunteer for an experiment,' maintained Liz stoutly. 'It's wrong.'

'The computer doesn't make mistakes!' Beth insisted.

'But *you* must know why I'm here.' Liz was staring at her other self now, this strange projection of her own personality into the future; and found it all profoundly disturbing. 'Well, I mean—if you're me, and I'm here... then you must remember *this*. Simon and me coming back from the Naval Station and getting into the ice-box—'

'Don't waste my time,' snapped Beth, heading for the door once more.

'—then going home to tell Mummy and the others... ' She hastened to Jean. 'Mummy! You remember. After Simon and I had

been in 1940—we found out about the radar and why Daddy was sick—’

‘Yes, Liz,’ said Jean slowly. ‘Yes, I remember that.’

‘Well, for goodness sake—we came on here.’

‘No.’ Jean was obviously in doubt at some level, but at the same time quite certain of this. ‘No, I don’t think so. I didn’t know a place like this was ever going to exist in those days...’

Liz could only stare at her, dismayed and more troubled than ever. Behind them, Beth snorted contemptuously.

‘All nonsense, you see.’ she said shortly. ‘Childish nonsense. I want the two of you to understand this matter is not to be discussed till I’ve found out everything I can. I’m certainly not having it noised abroad that I’m one and the same person... as this stupid child.’

There was no compromise in the tone, and again in the eyes Liz could read the deep antipathy that had so shocked her when first she had been confronted by it in the Fantasy Room; the enduring hatred. It seemed to lie on the air, a physical presence, even after Beth had left Jean’s quarters. ‘Golly...’ Liz found herself temporarily without vocal chords. ‘Mummy, it’s all crazy. How could I—anyone—turn out to be like *that* !’

But suddenly she became aware Jean was holding back tears. Liz was filled with remorse and hurried to her mother, putting consoling arms around her.

‘Oh, Mummy—Mummy, I’m sorry. It’s all awful—dreadful!—but I didn’t mean to upset you.’

Jean quickly mastered herself. ‘It’s all right, Liz,’ she replied. ‘You couldn’t know about it, but it’s the kind of upset I live with all the time nowadays.’

‘You mean—you don’t like it here?’ A new apprehension claimed Liz for a second, but then her mind went back to a persistent worry.

‘And Daddy,’ she said, ‘you still haven’t told me about Daddy.’

It wasn’t precisely that Jean avoided some issue within herself at this moment, wretchedly troubling; in fact, for a second or two her lips trembled as though she would say much. It was rather that a great tiredness overtook her. Her face seemed suddenly grey in the warm light of the room, and Liz noticed lines about her mother’s eyes that she had never seen before.

‘This... this has been an awful shock for me, Liz. Would you mind if we didn’t talk any more about it just now...?’

Simon came out of Devereaux’s office and whistled through his teeth, after the manner of mountaineers who have risked all on a bold leap, and just managed not to plummet into the chasm below. A chuckle reached his ears from across the corridor. Bukov stood there, pausing on his way to the computer room.

‘So,’ grinned the big Russian. ‘You’ll have to get used to it, Simon. Here, we’re all expected to behave as scientists should. The work is what counts. Our personal lives run a bad second.’

‘Yes,’ answered Simon, ruefully, ‘I’m beginning to get the idea.’

‘Any news of your friend Liz?’

Simon thought it better to say nothing on this, so Bukov merely nodded gravely and moved on. Simon abruptly went after him. ‘Doctor Bukov,’ he said, falling in with the other, ‘I’m still getting to know things here. So I wondered—what do you do exactly?’

‘Oh, I’m a physicist, Simon,’ replied Bukov, apparently pleased to be asked. Again, he gave the clear impression of only wishing to be friendly. ‘Everything depends on nuclear energy here, so I have charge of all that; and then I’m continuing experimentation into the uses of controlled radiation. You know—?’

‘Yes,’ said Simon, not wishing to appear ignorant of anything he should have been informed about.

‘Intelligence-enhancement, eh?’

‘Which?’ blinked Simon, exhibiting ignorance.

‘The enhancement of intelligence.’ Bukov had stopped just outside the computer-room door. ‘Well, it was a great step forward when we discovered the link between that and controlled exposure to radiation in the late ’seventies. But you still have to have the right subject. Have you had a course?’

‘Yes,’ said Simon. Then, just as quickly, ‘No.’

‘Don’t you *know*?’

‘No!’

Bukov looked at him very oddly. ‘It’s strange,’ he murmured. ‘From the beginning I wondered why else you and Liz would have been chosen for the AB experiment... But then, the computer never makes mistakes.’

He shrugged and went on into the computer room. For lack of anything better to do, Simon followed.

‘Bukov!’ said Larry, looking up from the control panel. ‘There you are—at last.’ He was rushing between the bank of switches and screens and some tapes set up exteriorly on a computer bastion.

‘At last?’ Bukov was bewildered.

‘Well, my video flash said pronto, didn’t it?’ Without waiting for a reply, Larry ‘cleared’ a central monitoring screen on the bank, depressed a series of switches so that back on the bastion, the top tape clicked into motion. ‘Now this is the power graph for Section 4, isolated from the general operational record,’ announced Larry. ‘Okay?’

They all watched the cleared screen, and in a moment a graph record began to travel across it—progressive, a jagged line, not

unlike seismograph charts Simon had seen, though hardly as dramatic in content. Then, without warning, the screen suddenly cut dead. Bukov looked sharply to Larry, but the other placed a quick hand on his arm. The screen took up again, and Larry 'killed' it.

'There you are,' he said heavily. 'A blank in the record. 05:16 hours this morning precisely. A fifteen-second power shut-off in Section 4.'

'But that can't happen,' protested Bukov.

'It has. Just like that three-minute close down in the water supply yesterday that shouldn't have happened, but did too. Bukov, what's going on around here? The only difference is that the water supply was my baby, this one is yours. Your turn to have "Human Error" blown down your ear.'

Yes,' nodded Bukov, worried now. 'Yes, I'll have to notify the Director, certainly.'

He depressed various controls. Simon, who had come up, looked to him as the cleared screen ran with lines.

'What's wrong, Doctor Bukov?' he asked.

'The power supply cut out for a brief period early this morning, Simon,' Bukov came back curtly. 'It's nothing to worry about. It's just that recently we've had—' He stopped as the screen before him ceased running, and showed Devereaux in his office, moving towards a door in the back wall; the door without a handle. 'Bukov to Director,' announced Bukov. 'Bukov to Director...'

'Hold on,' Larry cut in, fiddling with a fader. 'He must have phased out his audio.' And indeed the Director on the screen gave no appearance of having heard any summons. He stopped before the door, oblivious even of being watched, and slipped back a little panel in the jamb. Here he pressed a button, and the door slid back

noiselessly. There was only a thick darkness beyond. The Director moved in, and the door slid to.

‘He’s going into depth-research,’ said Bukov.

‘What’s that?’ Simon was intrigued now.

‘Depth-research?’ Bukov stared into the screen on the panel abstractedly. ‘Oh, a very complex process, Simon. Only the Director has the talent...’ But then abruptly his eyes snapped away from the screen and fell crossly on Simon; as though, inadvertently, he had said something that he should not have said; as though Simon had asked questions forbidden to the ordinary run of mortals. He cut away from the panel.

‘The Director must be a very clever man, Larry,’ Simon said thoughtfully, transferring his attention to the other. ‘Is he related to that other Devereaux?’

‘What other Devereaux?’

Simon was trying so hard to be casual that he sounded downright earnest. ‘Oh—the one I remember reading about in my History of Science book back at home. American, just like the Director. Died—ah—a couple of decades ago now.’

Busy winding off the operation record tapes now, Larry mumbled something about only knowing the Director himself, and that being enough to have to cope with. But farther across the room—and Simon did not observe this—Bukov was regarding Simon with what was abruptly a hard curiosity. His attitude seemed no longer that of a man whose only wish was to be friendly.

Liz entered the Fantasy Room in moody preoccupation. The roving colours and the peaceful contours of the place in general did a little to relieve the pressures on her; they were designed to, but they

could not take them away altogether. She felt strangely trapped. She had come back to the ice-box with her eyes open, and now did not care for what her eyes had seen. It seemed unfair.

A shape stirred over through the alcove in the fantasy section proper. It was Edith Joynton, eyes closed and wearing the head clamps; again away on her golden beaches, feeling the cool wind from her ice-capped mountains. Liz wondered dismally if *that* was really the answer. It all depended what you felt the need to escape from, she supposed.

The door clicked open behind her, and suddenly Simon stood there. He stared, his jaw dropping.

‘Liz! What... where...?’

‘Well, where do you think?’ Liz rejoined tautly. ‘The time barrier.’

‘You came back! ’

‘You’re quick, aren’t you?’

‘But your father—’

‘Oh,’ said Liz, as though that had never been a problem. ‘He changed his mind.’

‘He *let* you come. And you did.’ Liz made no answer to this. ‘That means—you wanted to.’ Again Liz chose not to respond. Simon moved closer. ‘Why, Liz... that’s great.’

He was grinning broadly. Liz cursed herself interiorly for not being able to rise to his mood, but then thought, too, that he might have been sensitive enough to see she was in no state to be grinned at. ‘Oh, Simon,’ she said, deciding on a tragic expression, ‘I’ve just found out something awful.’

‘I’ve been discovering things too. The Director—’

‘No, no. I mean something *awful*. For one thing, Mummy *is* here—I’ve just talked to her.’

‘What’s awful about that?’ asked Simon.

‘Nothing! Except she doesn’t seem to like it very much—she’s doing experiments in telepathy. And that girl—Beth...’

She stopped, frowning deeply, and Simon was puzzled. ‘What about her?’ he prompted.

‘Well, Simon, you see... Beth and me...’

‘Yes?’

Liz steeled herself. ‘Beth and I... are the same person.’ Now Simon was gazing at her blankly. He couldn’t understand what she was talking about, and wondered if perhaps their joint experiences had not begun to take a toll of her. Liz rattled on: ‘I mean it. It’s dead crazy, but it’s true. We’ve come into a future time, and what I’ve found out is that Beth is *me* — as I’m going to be in 1990.’

Suddenly Simon got it. He almost cried out, but instead said, ‘You’re joking.’

‘I wish I was,’ answered Liz in distress. ‘But I suppose it’s all possible with the time barrier and so on. Even Mummy says it’s so.’

‘You mean you’re going to grow up to be like *that*?’

‘Well, it isn’t my fault, is it?’

‘Isn’t it? I don’t know. Blimey,’ croaked Simon. He cleared his throat. ‘Listen, Liz... I’ve—ah—got one or two things to do just now —’

‘Wait. Where are you going?’

‘Nowhere. It’s nothing. Just something I said I’d—I mean... two minutes—’

‘Simon!’ But he was gone, a blur in the doorway. ‘Oh,’ sobbed Liz, falling into one of the chairs that obligingly took the shape of her body. ‘Oh,’ she exclaimed again.

She supposed there was nothing to do but cry now. And under the circumstances it didn’t seem in the least weak-minded.

BETH MOVED GENTLY about the Director's office, touching things, tidying where she felt the need. The gleaming room was having its customary effect on her; once more in her heart she was re-affirming her dedication to the ice-box, the person of Morgan Devereaux, and the cause of scientific research. She was entirely at one with her avocation when the door to the back room slid silently across, and Devereaux came out of the darkness beyond.

But he seemed taken aback to see her. Beth said apologetically, 'I'm sorry to intrude, Director, but it's an urgent matter. I wanted to report to you at the earliest moment that the girl volunteer has been found—Liz.'

'Ah,' said Devereaux, his face brightening. 'Splendid. Excellent. In good physical condition? Never mind, we can check that. Start her and the boy on HA57 at once.'

He moved to his desk to make a note of some kind on a pad, and it was really Beth's cue to go. But she seemed reluctant to leave just at once. Her voice became a little strained as she added, 'I was wondering, Director... is that strictly necessary?'

'Is what strictly necessary? To start the two of them on HA57?'

‘Yes.’ Beth gained confidence. ‘They’re hardly the right kind of people for a prolonged stay in the ice-box, you know. Perhaps we should simply use them for the AB experiment and then get rid of them as soon as possible.’

Devereaux seemed perplexed. ‘But my dear Beth, you know as well as I do that there must be a lengthy period of observation afterwards.’

‘Then I’d like to suggest they should be replaced,’ said Beth bravely.

‘What—?’

‘They’re not the right people for our community here, Director, I’m certain of it! How do we even know they’re really the volunteers we were supposed to receive?’

Her tone was earnest now, and it was impossible to tell if surprise or simply annoyance predominated in Devereaux’s response. He moved round the desk to her.

‘Beth... you’re not suggesting, I hope, that the computer has made a mistake?’

‘No, Director.’ Though on dangerous ground, Beth was determined to stick to her guns. ‘The computer instruction read “expect arrivals soonliest”. But it didn’t necessarily say *these* arrivals.’

‘Yet if these aren’t the expected arrivals, who on earth are they?’ asked Devereaux logically.

‘That’s hard to say.’

‘It’s the middle of the Antarctic. Do people arrive here accidentally?’

‘No.’ She was faltering at length. ‘Unless—unless by some means we don’t completely understand, perhaps...’ Devereaux regarded her a long moment, and she was forced to avoid his

calculating gaze. Then the Director permitted himself a short laugh. 'Well,' he said, 'an interesting development. Most interesting.' He moved back behind his desk again, sitting rather heavily. 'I thought you were one of the few people I could rely on, Beth.'

'You can, Director.'

'I thought you understood.' Devereaux's voice was abruptly louder. 'I've appreciated your work on the administrative side here, you know. I've even been thinking for a while that I should have a personal assistant to relieve me of the heavier responsibilities. It had occurred to me the right person for that job might be you.'

Beth gasped. She had been expecting nothing like this. 'But not any more, it seems.'

'Why not?' Beth was perhaps surprised at the alarm in her own tone. 'I haven't said anything to make any difference.'

'You're questioning things, Beth,' declared Devereaux. 'The computer requires blind obedience. I require it! No matter how unlikely, how perverse a particular directive may seem, it is beyond all argument the right one. Liz and Simon couldn't have come here at all unless the computer had summoned them, don't you see that? That's the *fact*—everything else is irrelevant.'

Meeting his forceful gaze, Beth knew now why she served this man, why his ideals, his ambitions had become identical with hers. There was in him a power that was almost hypnotic in its effect; that seemed in fact to proceed from outside as well as from within him, as though he were a man somehow singled out from the human race, given an authority from beyond to command and rule. So she understood that she would accept the presence of Liz and Simon in the ice-box, however mystifying it might seem. Liz was only a troubling incident; Liz was no longer her; though she could never understand it, it was blessedly none of her concern.

‘I see, Director,’ said Beth humbly. ‘I’ve been very silly. I beg your pardon.’

‘No,’ said Liz, reasonably enough. ‘It might hurt.’

‘Don’t be a dill,’ replied Edith Joynton cheerfully. ‘This injects straight through the skin and doesn’t leave a mark. It isn’t one of your old-fashioned needles.’

There was the little whoosh of the jet-injector, and Liz had to agree it was entirely painless. It had been a morning of preparation for their first dose of HA57, and Liz understood that there was hardly a disease known to man that she and Simon could any longer catch. ‘All set, Beth,’ announced Edith Joynton.

Beth turned to Larry at the computer panel. If her state of mind was now entirely definable, her general attitudes were no cosier. ‘Come along,’ she said impatiently. ‘You fed in all the vital data over ten minutes ago. How long must we wait for the dosage of HA57?’

Larry merely punched a panel control in reply, and suggested, ‘How about some music tonight, Beth?’

‘Don’t be ridiculous.’

‘Honest, I’ve discovered some good old Leonard Bernstein in the repertoire. We could have a go at it together.’

‘Larry,’ Beth informed him, making sure the patience showed, ‘you must know I’ve got better things to do tonight than listen to music.’

‘You’ve always got better things to do.’

So Liz said brightly, ‘I’ll listen to some music with you tonight, Larry.’

Larry blinked at her. ‘Liz honey—I didn’t know you cared.’ Then he called to the computer room at large, ‘Hey, what do you know? I

finally found me a girl. Be mine, Liz. We'll make such wonderful music together.'

He swung her round in a mock Viennese waltz, and Liz screeched delightedly. Beth turned away in a mixture of contempt and uncomplicated bad temper. Light-mindedness, or what she chose to think of as light-mindedness, always filled her with dismay.

Another spectator to the drollery who didn't much care for it either was Simon. Even though it was nothing to do with him, since Liz would one day be Beth and that seemed to be effectively *that*, he still thought people, and especially young girls whose parents were elsewhere, shouldn't make exhibitions of themselves. Liz *had* qualities, he reflected soberly, and she should really make the most of them before that dread night came down when she would turn round and find she was Beth. Yet looked at coldly, just like that, the proposition in itself seemed derisory. Liz becoming Beth! The two obviously had so little in common... A chinking of glass made him look round. Bukov was at a wall cupboard farther over, examining some odd-looking phials. Simon went across.

'What's that, Doctor Bukov?'

'This, Simon?' Bukov was holding up the phials one after another, inspecting them closely. 'Well—this is what you could call our last ditch...'

'Oh,' said Simon, clearly no wiser.

'We have to provide for every emergency here,' the Russian went on, 'and if by any unlikely chance the computer should one day blow up or the reactor fall to pieces, then these little bottles would be our salvation. You must understand they contain... anti-freeze.' Simon didn't know exactly how to take this. But then Bukov's sharp eye was on him, and he gave a big laugh. 'Good joke, eh? You see, if

everything failed here, we'd ice over. So we'd swallow these, and then manage to survive till help came.'

'Honestly?' asked Simon, impressed.

Bukov nodded. 'Short-term hibernation. We've solved the problems of that, yes. But as for long-term hibernation...' He sighed, replacing the last bottle and closing the cupboard over. Simon's curiosity abruptly took another turn.

'There's so much here to make you think,' he remarked. 'This HA57, now—it must be a pretty extraordinary formula.'

'Only the Director knows the secret,' Bukov grinned, tapping his head significantly. 'And he keeps it up here in his head, where it can't go astray.'

Simon would have had to be a trained diplomatist to have avoided his next question. 'You mean there's nothing written down?' he inquired.

Turning away to busy himself with other matters, Bukov stopped. He looked back at Simon, the hard look in his eye again—the one that Simon had not observed before. Suddenly a little fearsome, he demanded, 'Why should you ask a thing like that?'

'Well—' began Simon, duly rattled.

'You want to know too much. You're too curious for a boy who's just a volunteer for an experiment...' Then, curiously, as though he did not particularly like himself in belligerent mood, he added grudgingly, 'You can only know this. There's a testament somewhere. I said we provide for every emergency here. Well, so we do. So if anything were to happen to the Director himself—there's a testament. The work will always go on, you see, Simon. No matter what. The work matters more than us...'

Simon nodded, puzzled at length by this man who seemed at such pains to be kind to him, and yet clearly could be a dangerous

adversary if the need arose. A loud buzzer sounded on a computer bastion.

‘Come and get it!’ sang Edith Joynton cheerily.

‘Doctor Joynton,’ Beth complained, ‘do you really have to behave on all occasions as though you were calling cowboys home to the ranch for supper?’

Edith chortled. ‘Don’t mind me, Beth,’ she responded. ‘Rough-as-bags Joynton, they used to call me at International Medical School in Geneva. But I still turned out a better physician and surgeon than most of the smoothies around the place.’

She had approached the bastion as the buzzer stopped, and now opened a central trap. Two small plastic packages were in evidence, respectively stamped with the names and physical data of Liz and Simon. Edith handed them one each. ‘Open and consume contents,’ she directed. ‘Come back every day at the same time for another delivery, having fed your statistics into the computer at 09:00 as per instructions.’

Liz and Simon exchanged a nervous glance. Now that it had actually come to it, they wondered what they might be letting themselves in for. Edith chortled again, snapped open their packages for them. Each contained a large red pill.

‘Don’t be afraid, my children,’ she encouraged. ‘This is what men have searched for down the centuries. The elixir of life...’

Simon hissed, ‘He’s left his office now.’

‘Who’s left his office?’

‘The Director, Liz! You remember. Bukov told me there was a testament somewhere. Explaining about the longevity drug. Now if

we can only get hold of that for Commander Traynor, we needn't hang around here any longer.'

'Are you really so anxious to be out of the place?' asked Liz bleakly.

It was night, and they were in the Fantasy Room. At the far end, Bukov and Edith were in conversation, laughing and joking. Closer to, Beth sat at a table with Jean, addressing the older woman with great earnestness. It made Liz unhappy. What were they discussing? she wondered. Her? What should be done about her? Or her father, perhaps.

Yes, that was it. Liz fretted. What was the truth about her father, and why wouldn't they say...?

'Now's the time,' insisted Simon in the same sibilant tone. 'They're all off duty.'

'Look, do I *have* to?' complained Liz, annoyed and suddenly a bit bolshie.

'Yes! Unless you'd sooner forget about me and just wait for Larry to take you out dancing.'

Liz glared at this unpleasant boy. 'Oh, come on,' she said blackly.

There was no one in the corridor, but Simon looked carefully around before leading Liz swiftly to the Director's door. 'You wait here,' he instructed conspiratorially. 'I'll go inside and see what I can find. Three loud knocks if anyone's coming—right?'

'Oh, I get it,' answered Liz. 'You have all the fun and I'm Rover the watchdog.'

'Any better suggestions?' snarled Simon.

The door was not locked; it had never been a custom in the ice-box to secure against intruders. Simon gently opened the door and disappeared into the shadows within. The lights were at half-power.

Liz sighed and leaned back against the door jamb, preoccupied with her own problems.

Once inside, Simon realized the dimensions of the task he had set himself. In a sense, it was even ludicrous. Where exactly did he start to look? He tried some drawers; these were hard closed. He moved softly to a filing cabinet against the wall, which opened at a touch; but within, there was just so much material that it seemed unlikely the testament would be kept there. He turned back, and as he did so his eyes fell on the door to the back room. In a flash, it seemed obvious. In there, in the strange darkness of 'depth-research' would surely be found all the secrets of the place. He moved to search for the hidden button that opened the door.

Out in the corridor, Liz was just changing from one foot to the other, when Beth came out of the Fantasy Room and stopped short.

'What are you doing there?' she asked suspiciously, looking to Liz. 'Didn't you hear what I said? What are you doing?'

It occurred to Liz that sometimes in life occasions will go on conspiring against people, but she reacted to the emergency as she should and turned to rap on the Director's door. To her alarm, however, Beth was beside her before her knuckles could strike the wood, seizing her arm in a powerful grip. 'Leave me alone!' protested Liz. 'I wanted to see the Director about something. I was knocking on his door.' She began to struggle.

A section of the skirting board snapped back under Simon's hand; a large white button was revealed. Simon pressed this, there was abruptly a quick humming sound and the door slid back. Within, there was only the blackest of darkness...

'What's the game?' cried Beth, retaining her grip on Liz though she writhed like a wild thing. 'You're up to something, and I mean to find out what it is.'

‘No! I just wanted to see the Director.’

‘Beth—what’s the matter?’ They swung round. It was Devereaux, coming out of the computer room. Liz gasped, panic-stricken now. In the event, she lost her head. ‘Simon!’ she shrieked. ‘Simon!’

What happened then was afterwards a bit of a blur. Beth struck her, Liz thought, dragging her bodily aside as Devereaux raced up and plunged into his office. Bukov appeared, apparently having emerged from the Fantasy Room. And from within, out of sight, came the Director’s shout of rage.

‘You!’ cried Devereaux, staring at Simon in disbelief. ‘You in here...’

His eyes blazed. Suddenly and terrifyingly, something seemed to break in him. Before the still-open door to the black back room, Simon had no chance to run before the Director had raced forward and seized him round the throat.

‘Prying! No one dares pry into the Director’s affairs...’ Simon wrenched and tore at the powerful hands. He could no longer breathe and his head was swimming.

Blindly, he raised a clenched fist to smash it into Devereaux’s face—when all at once, astonishingly, he found he was free. Devereaux still held his hands in the strangling position, but had ceased to apply pressure. He simply stood there, a grim statue, his face a silent mask. His eyes were closed, and to all intents and purposes he had lost consciousness.

Simon couldn’t understand what had happened. He reeled back, separating himself from his assailant, but nothing seemed to make very much sense. The broad figure of Bukov appeared in the office doorway.

‘Director,’ he said. ‘I wondered if—’

‘Bukov,’ replied the Director at once. As suddenly as he had lost consciousness, or whatever had happened, he was himself again. ‘Yes. Yes, of course—the very man I wanted to see. That power failure in Section 4 this morning. It was your fault.’

‘No, Director.’ Bukov was mystified, but at the same time alert to accusation. ‘I checked the reactor, and—’

‘Human error!’ cried Devereaux. ‘You seem to have picked up the germ of carelessness from Larry. Am I never to get true cooperation from my staff in this place? Must I spend all my years bearing the burden of responsibility—alone?’ He moved round behind his desk, and saw Simon. He seemed puzzled for a moment, then asserted himself. ‘That will be all,’ he nodded, and sat down.

Devereaux plainly had no recollection of Simon’s intrusion into his office, or his attack on him.

WHEN A SHAKEN Simon and Bukov came back out into the corridor, there was no sign any more of Liz or Beth. Bukov closed the Director's door, looked to Simon. 'So,' he said, 'what happened?'

Simon realized he honestly had very little notion. 'I don't know,' he ventured. 'He—he got his hands round my throat. I thought he was going to kill me.'

'And then?'

'He just... let go.'

Bukov regarded Simon a further moment, then sighed deeply. 'Simon, if you're going to meddle in things here, there's something you'd better understand,' he said slowly. 'Professor Devereaux... isn't quite like the rest of us in the ice-box.' Simon was perplexed by this, and couldn't think of an immediate response. 'Oh, he's a brilliant man. The finest scientific brain in the world. But he isn't a human being as you and I use the term. He's a new species. Devereaux is different, Simon... a man of the future.'

Simon's eyes widened. The reaction seemed to gratify Bukov, for he came a little closer. Again, without betraying a certain essential reserve, he seemed kindly. 'Perhaps you've a right to know what I mean. Do you know anything about imprint cells?'

‘No,’ confessed Simon.

‘For a long time it’s been known in biology that you can extract cells from a living person that contain his whole genetic structure. If these cells could then be cultivated, brought to maturity... the result would be another person, exactly the same as the person the cells first came from. Someone identical.’

Simon gave a low whistle. But the words came out in a bit of a jumble. ‘You mean—hold on—Devereaux is—’

‘Professor Devereaux is a clone.’

‘A clone?’

‘That’s the word for it. And he’s the first in the world’s history, Simon. Identical with that earlier Devereaux—the one you seem to know so much about—’

‘Oh, I just heard of him,’ Simon put in quickly.

‘The famous biologist. Imprint cells were taken from him before his death, but because there was no technique available to mature them then, they were scientifically stored. Then, in the late ’seventies when conditions were right, a new Devereaux was given to the world.’

There was now on Simon’s face an expression which seemed to say that, after all, he was not sure if he really liked what he had been told. Bukov added, in the manner of a qualification, ‘Mind you, we don’t know a lot about cloning yet. The kind of effects it’s likely to produce. So Professor Devereaux himself could be called an experiment under observation in the ice-box.’

‘But he’s running the place,’ objected Simon.

Bukov chuckled. ‘Naturally, with abilities like his he had to be given complete control. But Doctor Joynton and I have been detailed by the International Commission who established the ice-box to keep him under scrutiny and report.’ The Russian looked direct into

Simon's eyes, his gaze a little more penetrating now. 'And that makes an incident like this evening's... more important than it seems, perhaps.'

Simon abruptly understood the reason for all these confidences. It had been in the back of his mind to ask why he should be so favoured, anyway. He returned his companion's gaze. 'He—he seemed to go mad for a minute,' was all he could add. 'Honestly. But a moment later—'

'Yes?'

Simon still hadn't worked it out. 'I don't know.'

Bukov sighed again. 'Well, Simon, if ever you notice anything you think I should know, I hope you'll tell me. It seems to me you're involved now. For reasons I don't completely understand...'

Simon tried a weak grin. It got him nowhere with Bukov. The big Russian was nobody's fool; nor the sort to remain content for ever with evasions.

Beth clattered some stuff down on to the transparent plastic block that served for a table in the little bedroom. 'Cassettes, music tapes, reading matter,' she enumerated. 'At least you can't complain you're being harshly treated. But this door secures electronically from outside, and I'm locking you in until there's been a full inquiry into what you and Simon were after in the Director's office.'

'It's just because it's me, isn't it?' Liz bit back belligerently. 'Anyone else you wouldn't mind about. But me you've got to pick up.'

Liz was sitting on the amorphous shape that became a comfortable bed when you laid down, an armchair when you just wanted to sit. Again the room had a contour rather than a strict form.

The absence of windows was relieved by restful 3-D murals, which could be altered by twisting a dial on the wall.

Beth took no notice of Liz's little outburst. But at the door she looked back to say icily, 'Just let's get something straight, shall we? I don't want anything to do with you. If the computer hadn't summoned you, I'd take you by the scruff of your neck and shove you right back through that ridiculous time barrier of yours.'

'But the computer didn't summon me,' Liz protested. 'What are you talking about? I just came.'

'The computer doesn't make mistakes,' repeated Beth, a religious devotee intoning her article of faith. 'The computer doesn't make mistakes.'

And then she was gone. A brief whirring sound told Liz that some mechanism had shut the door fast. She sighed disconsolately. Then she got up and began to wander about the tiny room. It was funny how, just as in the Fantasy Room downstairs, it all looked different from different angles. She toyed with the dial that controlled the 3-D murals. Now she was beside a tropic sea, now in the mountains; but all at once, without warning, everything was green about her and tidily-fenced fields rolled away under a still grey sky. The illusion was so much of her part of England, of home, that Liz wanted to burst into tears. Indeed she would have done so if at this point there had not come a rapping on her door.

'Liz! Liz? Can you hear me?'

'Mummy,' cried Liz. 'I'm locked in.'

'Just a moment...'

There was silence for a second or two, then the whirring sound again. The door clicked open and Jean came in.

'Child, why are you locked up?' Liz ran to her and told her, grateful and anxious to spare Beth no future embarrassment. But

when she heard that Liz and Simon had been prying about the Director's office, Jean was deeply shocked. 'Listen to me, Liz,' she said earnestly, 'you've got to be very careful while you're here, dear. Believe me! They can be very hard when they like, these people.'

'I can see they've got you believing it anyway,' replied Liz fretfully.

'What do you mean by that?'

'Mummy, you hate the whole place! Anyone could see it. So why did you ever come?'

Jean stared at her daughter, perturbed. It had not occurred to her either that Liz might have understood so well or that her own position really mattered to such an extent. But she realized that for Liz's sake she must say something. 'Yes,' she agreed gently. 'Yes, I suppose you've a right to know more... Well, it began as I told you, Liz. In the late seventies we lost our home. Your father's business failed. Then Beth got the idea of coming to the icebox.'

'Daddy,' responded Liz. 'Why did—'

'She'd gone in for what was called an intelligence-enhancement course,' Jean went on rather quickly, moving away. 'It's supposed to extend a person to the limit of their capacity. But in Beth's case it seemed to bring about... a change of personality. It was then she altered her name, anyway, became so very different. I could hardly recognize her as the girl she'd been before. As Liz...' Now the narration was becoming difficult for Jean. She hastened to conclude, 'So I really hadn't very much choice but to come with her here when it came to the point. She might have needed me again, you see. I couldn't tell...'

Liz was moved by this, and indeed understood how hard it must have been for her mother. But one question remained uppermost in her mind. 'You still haven't told me... she faltered. 'What about—?'

That Jean quite anticipated the question, and did not want to deal with it, was obvious from the way she now avoided Liz's eyes and moved for the door. Liz had to cry after her, 'Mummy, why won't you tell me about Daddy? Is he dead?'

'No, Liz!' Jean stopped in her tracks. 'No, your father isn't dead.'

'Then what... *please*.'

Jean paused a long moment. Her voice was at once deeply weary and controlled as she evinced, 'There's nothing for you to worry about. I'd like to say more, but I've decided it would be unwise. I'll see that you're let out of here now. I'll look after you, Liz—just as I did in other days. Trust me, darling. Above all—trust me.'

Liz was only imprisoned for another hour or so, then the electronic lock was clicked off, and she found herself a free agent again. But nobody had precisely come to release her, which in the circumstances she found gratifying. Whatever else it mightn't have been, it was great sucks to Beth.

She therefore went to the Fantasy Room that night in jubilant mood, and Larry, taken by her vivacity, introduced her for the first time to the fantasy gear.

'Look, all you need to do is hold my hand,' he explained as they slipped the head clamps on. 'That links us computer-wise. Then we can fly to the Moon.'

'Is it really true?'

'Try it and see. Blast off.'

'Ooh,' gurgled Liz, as her body began to go stiff before the collapse into relaxation, 'it's real, it *is* ! The Moon... so close...'

And Simon, watching a little censoriously from a safe distance wondered two things, the first of which made him feel ashamed and

the second of which restored his confidence. They were: would he have the courage to abandon himself to the governance of a machine so obviously superior? And, really if Liz was determined to make a fool of herself, shouldn't she do it somewhere in private rather than here and with that pushing Larry? Simon swung for the door.

Beth was sitting at a table, busy with files and taking no notice of anything else. But she looked up as Simon went by.

'Oh, Simon,' she said briskly, 'you and Liz will attend Doctor Joynton first thing tomorrow for calibration checks.' She tore a paper off a pad. 'Present this slip.'

'Calibration checks?' replied Simon, taking the paper in perplexity. 'What are they?'

'What they sound like. Measurements, dimensions.'

'For clothes?'

Beth clicked her tongue in annoyance. 'Kindly don't be stupid. The Director wants to get started on the AB experiment, so we need to know precisely the size of the organs of your body that are to be replaced with machine parts.'

Not all of this seemed to impinge on Simon's consciousness at once. 'You're going to give us artificial organs instead of our own?' he blinked.

'Of course.'

'So *that's* the AB experiment?' His voice was unexpectedly loud. 'To fill Liz and me up with machine parts?'

'It makes a difference?' asked Beth sharply. Then her eyes narrowed, and she went on in an even tone, 'Don't think you can deceive me, Simon. No matter how you got here, the computer summoned you. As *volunteers*.' Beth stood, gathering up her papers. 'You and Liz are really very lucky young people. Inefficient and

obsolete organs of your body are to be removed and replaced. You'll be the first man-machine chimeras in the history of the world.'

THEY DID calibrations in the ice-box by means of audio clamps that emitted signals when secured to different parts of the body, which the computer then picked up and interpreted with formidable accuracy. X-rays were not employed unless some pathological condition was observed which might be considered to confute the mathematical exactitude.

Simon had less trouble in appreciating the complexities of this technique than in persuading Liz to lie still on the couch next to him in the infirmary and just tell herself it all wasn't going to happen. She had nearly had hysterics when he had broken to her the joyous news that given half a chance, the denizens of the ice-box meant to provide them with a whole set of gleaming new machine parts.

'...and double-check the specifications for the boy's artificial heart,' came Devereaux's voice from over by a computer-feed screen with Edith Joynton. 'That's an area where we can't have the least deviation.' Not for the first time that morning, Liz sat up to strip the clamps from her and run, but Simon pushed her down again. His grand strategy—for of course he had one—required here and now that they merely play it very cool.

Devereaux had begun to move in their direction. 'I'll want you to do the surgery yourself, Doctor Joynton.'

'I see, Director.'

'We can set a tentative date a fortnight from today.' Before the twin couches, he paused to frown down at Liz and Simon. 'Now that seems to settle the question of the internal organs,' he remarked gravely. 'There remains the matter of the limbs we intend to replace.'

Simon could not conceal a gulp at this, and on Liz's lips there trembled a silent scream. Edith didn't help things by saying: 'Yes. Liz—you come along with me.'

'What for?' Liz was quivering like the imperilled heroine of a Frankenstein movie.

'Because we're going to give you a nice new arm, and we'll have to take a cast of the one you've got.'

'But I don't want a nice new arm,' wailed Liz. 'What's the matter with the one I've got? It picks up things nicely, moves around as it should. Look. I'll be a freak with a tin arm.'

Edith hooted with laughter. 'Tin arm! Girlie, you're not living in the sleazy Sixties. The kind of prosthetic arm we're going to give you is a thousand times more efficient than the one you've got.'

'Yes, Liz,' encouraged Simon, anxious to keep her calm. 'Stronger—easier to use—'

'You've said it. Just like the leg we're going to give you, Simon,' beamed Edith. That stopped him, but by that time she had Liz detached from the clamps and out the door. Simon was thus alone with Devereaux. He began to release himself.

'Simon,' said Devereaux.

'Yes?'

'Never enter my office again, you hear me? Never. Not for any reason.'

Then he hadn't completely forgotten the incident, Simon realized. That was interesting. He waited, and Devereaux turned to look him in the eye. It was not a pleasant regard.

'Curiosity is a vice in a place like the ice-box, my boy. I programme the computer, and the computer lays down the shape of our lives. And that's all there is to it.'

'And you learn how to programme the computer through depth-research,' suggested Simon.

'Depth-research?' Devereaux's glance hardened. 'What do you know of depth-research?'

'Only what Doctor Bukov was saying. I suppose—I suppose you must have found out the secret of HA57 through depth-research.' Quite suddenly, Devereaux trembled, as though violent anger were about to claim him again. It gave Simon a momentary and absurd feeling that he was gaining an advantage; but he quickly put this out of his head to add defensively, 'Well, I think HA57 is something terrific. It must be the greatest scientific advance since the beginning of the world.'

Devereaux's reaction now was curious. He mastered his trembling, but gave a loud grunt, smacking one fist loudly down into the other. He smiled tautly. 'Such beguiling innocence. Oh, if you had the fortune or the craft, Simon, you could make your name ring from pole to pole. Check? You could emerge from your period in the ice-box as one of the great scientific innovators of all times. The inventor of the longevity drug!'

'I never meant anything like that,' protested Simon.

'Don't lie to me, boy!' Devereaux was getting worked up in spite of himself. 'People of far greater moment than you would like to get hold of the formula I and the computer have perfected. But that won't

happen. The formula is well guarded. Personal to me until such time as I am of no further use, and then...'

On the instant, it had happened again. Half turned away from Simon, Devereaux had stopped dead in mid-action. His eyes were closed, and he had dropped into his strange unconsciousness.

Simon scrambled off the couch and hurried across. He passed his hand up and down a couple of times before the Director's face; there was no question but that he was unaware of his surroundings. Then the eyes snapped open again, and the hard gaze fell on Simon.

'So keep out of my office, Simon,' instructed Devereaux. 'Attend to your own affairs. No more prying.'

Later, in the computer room, Simon said privately to Bukov, 'Did you know that the Director has blackouts every so often?'

'Blackouts?' Bukov was guiding some complex calculations through the computer, but at once gave Simon his full attention.

'You said if I ever had anything I'd like to tell you about the Director, I was to speak. Well, there's this. I wasn't sure at first, but I am now. When he found me in his office, he tried to strangle me.'

'You said that.'

'Then in the middle of it—he just stopped.'

'Changed his mind?'

'No. It was as though he'd fallen asleep or something. He just wasn't there for a minute. It's true.'

The computer chattered behind them, and a light flashed. Bukov turned to make a minimal adjustment to a tape on a panel, his face grave.

'Haven't you ever noticed it, Doctor Bukov?'

‘No, Simon, I can’t say I have. But as I told you, a clone is a new species of human being. I suppose it’s always possible that...’ But then he decided against facile judgements and merely shook his head slowly. ‘Thank you, Simon. Say nothing to anyone else about this. I’ll try and talk to you again.’

Jean turned her head, shocked. ‘Then that’s the AB experiment,’ she gasped. ‘I never knew.’

‘Yes, Mummy—and they really mean to do it! Give us new lungs and arms and legs and all sorts of awful things. We’ve been measured up for them.’

‘But there’s been a terrible mistake! Haven’t any of them realized?’

‘No, they’re all convinced we’re the volunteers. They keep on saying the computer can’t make mistakes. Even Beth who *knows* who we are...’ Liz stared at her mother, frightened on her own account but also in confusion of mind. ‘Mummy, this is a dreadful place. How can you bear to stay here?’

They were in Jean’s plain little room, sitting around the square table. Jean sighed deeply, then rose, as though moving about might ease her anxiety.

‘Liz,’ she said at length, ‘we can’t cope with this situation any more. You’ll just have to go. You and Simon. Back through the time barrier.’

‘But I can’t!’ answered Liz desperately. ‘Not till I know about Daddy.’

‘And I can’t tell you! Why don’t you understand?’

For the first time Liz felt a movement of anger towards her mother. ‘Look, why can’t you tell me? I’ve got a right to know. I’ll stay

here and let them do these awful things to me if you don't speak, honest I will! You're being—being'—Liz sought wildly for a word, and as usual under such circumstances found a wild one—'obverse.'

Jean allowed herself a little smile. It took the tension out of the situation, and she said gently: 'We live among mysteries, Liz. Perhaps we've just got to be brave enough to bear them. I can tell you this much, though. I *do* think this is a dreadful place. The things they do here frighten me.'

'Then why do you stay? Just for Beth?'

'Isn't it a good enough reason?'

'Oh! ' Liz's confusion of mind had increased and now she was upset too. 'I think Beth's hopeless. All mixed up. Nothing to do with me.'

'Then go back through the barrier,' said her mother. 'Please.' But she added, hesitantly, 'There's something else I can tell you. It isn't much, but you'll have to be satisfied with it. I also stay here... for your father's sake. If it weren't for your father, I mightn't be here at all.'

Liz felt suddenly like a little girl again, dispassionately sent up to bed because there were family secrets to be discussed and the knowledge of them might distress her.

'Well, you great steaming nit,' expostulated Simon. 'We've got to do it now then, don't you see?'

'Why?' inquired Liz, admirably cool. 'Who wants the silly old HA57 formula anyway?'

'I do. I promised Commander Traynor.'

'I didn't.'

‘Then shove off,’ suggested Simon cordially. ‘Leave me to do the dirty work and get caught and that, and you just run off home and cry over Larry.’

‘Simon,’ said Liz darkly, ‘one day when you least expect it, something’s going to hit you very hard. It’ll be me, throwing a steam roller.’

‘Lovers’ tiff?’ cackled Edith Joynton, passing by their chairs. ‘That’s the stuff. I don’t reckon we’ve had one of them around here since they sunk the foundations. Keep up the good work.’

They smiled weakly across the Fantasy Room at her as Edith and her laugh receded in the direction of the alcove. There were times when Edith could prove a bit of a cross to carry. Liz even wondered how she managed to maintain so constantly chummy and open an attitude when in some other part of herself she was ready and willing to chop off people’s arms and legs. Something to do with the ‘Scientific Mind’, she supposed, which Simon was supposed to share.

Liz watched Edith put on the clamps, stiffen, and drop away into fantasy, then became aware Simon’s eyes were on her, demanding an answer. She sighed painfully. Why was she always so put upon? Women were bom to suffer. With an inner tear for her gentle forbearance, her sex, and the whole stupid situation, she got up and went out to get on with it.

Both Liz and Simon went into the Director’s office this time. Again the lights were at half-power, and in a moment Simon had the back-room door open and stood peering into the darkness beyond.

‘What happens now?’ hissed Liz.

What did happen, in fact, was not at all what was scheduled. The office door opened, and Liz and Simon had barely time to scuttle down behind the desk before Beth came into the room. She walked straight up to the backroom door and then stopped, as though surprised to see it open. Then she went on in.

As she did, a remarkable thing occurred. She touched no switch anywhere, but, as she progressed, the light as it were moved after her from the office, so that in a moment Liz and Simon were in black darkness, and the room within glowed instead. Through the open door, Simon was thus able to see that the little room contained another, smaller computer, and that Beth had stopped before a particular bastion, checking some dials and making notes. She did it in a familiar manner, altogether without strangeness. It was all deeply puzzling. But Simon jerked silently with his head at Liz. They would obviously have to come back later.

As a child, Liz's father had often told her she must have been born with too many feet; and indeed there may have been some truth in the judgement, for in spite of the fact that there was only one movable object in the Director's office, a wastepaper basket, Liz contrived to fall over it as she and Simon crept for the office door. She came down with a crash, and the metal basket clanged like Big Ben.

'What's that?' cried Beth from within.

A furious Simon dragged Liz to her feet and bundled her for the door. But they were not nearly out before Beth had appeared in the aperture behind, the lights 'following' her as before.

'You two again!' she gasped. Suddenly an alarm began to ring.

Simon paused for no civilities, but belted out into the corridor, yanking Liz after him. Here, there seemed to be a species of chaos. The alarm was shrilling violently, and Bukov raced along from the

computer room, Larry on his heels. 'Emergency,' he shouted as he went past. 'Fantasy Room...'

'This is monstrous!' Beth was very nearly sobbing with rage as she rushed out of the Director's office to the now immobilized Liz and Simon. 'The Director will—' But then she too became aware of the alarm, and turned at once for the Fantasy Room. Liz and Simon seemed to have no course but to follow.

Bukov burst into the Fantasy Room, stopped in his tracks. Over by the alcove, somebody lay spreadeagled on the floor. As the others entered the room, Bukov hurried across. It was Edith Joynton, lying on her face. He turned her over. Then he cried out.

Edith was staring blindly ahead. But her face was now sunken and deeply wrinkled; her hair white, the wispy straggle of an incredibly aged woman. Her mouth hung open, a gaping hollow. She was dead.

‘No—NO, DON’T LOOK!’ Liz was in bitter and terrified tears, trying desperately to avert Jean’s face from the awful sight on the floor over there; that staring and desiccated husk that had once been Edith Joynton. In the event, Jean clasped Liz to her, to still her hysterical weeping. They were all there now, all the personnel of the ice-box, attracted by the alarm, which Edith must herself have set off before she fell to the floor. It had stopped, and Devereaux rose from what remained of her, his face grey. ‘Beth?’ he queried.

Beth summoned up her resources. ‘Doctor Joynton was in fantasy, Director. I happened to look in here five minutes ago, and—’

‘Everything normal?’

‘Yes, Director.’

‘The fantasy gear?...’

Devereaux’s eyes flickered round the room. While obviously deeply shocked in himself, he was remembering his position, consciously refusing to show any weakness. He gave a hard grunt. ‘Well—a fairly obvious diagnosis, I should have thought. Do I have to spell it out for anyone?’

‘No, Director,’ replied Bukov soberly.

‘Is it—’ Beth’s voice shook. ‘Is it the longevity drug?’

‘Yes, Beth,’ murmured Larry. ‘It’s failed.’

‘The longevity drug can’t fail!’ Devereaux swung round on Larry. ‘Oh no. I checked the prescriptions on brain link to the computer this morning as usual, and they were all entirely accurate. So what’s the explanation, I wonder? Looks like more carelessness, doesn’t it? Criminal carelessness this time. I must inform you,’ he continued, ‘that I shall have to make a full report to the International Commission about this, and under the circumstances I shall have no choice but to treat it as a case of murder.’

His eyes strayed briefly back to Edith Joynton on the floor, then he turned rapidly and moved out of the room.

‘Please,’ said Bukov a little helplessly to the others. ‘I’ll attend to things here. The rest of you...’

They were grateful and sombrely went out.

In the corridor, the Director had paused, his brows knitted. As the others emerged, he turned and said, ‘Larry.’

‘Yes. Director?’

‘You’re relieved of all duties and confined to quarters until further notice.’

Larry gaped. ‘You don’t suspect me, sir?’

‘Whatever the fault, it could only have been yours,’ declared Devereaux forcibly. ‘If the prescriptions were correct, and they were, then the mistake must have occurred during manufacture. You have a watching brief over that.’

‘But I checked everything out against the instruction tapes, same as always.’

‘Be silent!’ Devereaux could well have been working up into one of his rages again. ‘It was your error—your error. Is there anyone else you can think of who’d qualify as well? You’re not suggesting I could have had anything to do with Edith Joynton’s death?’

With the exception of Beth, who had the bad manners to look a little gratified, they were all stunned by this attack. Simon, who had simply been struck dumb by all that had happened, thought it uncalled for. But Liz, whose tears had dried, thought it well over the odds, and found to her surprise that she had the courage to say so.

‘That’s unfair,’ she cried. She moved to Devereaux. ‘Why don’t you all leave Larry alone? He hasn’t done anything wrong.’

‘How dare you speak to the Director like that,’ snapped Beth.

‘Oh, you,’ Liz ran on recklessly. ‘I’m not screwed up in things here like you are. I don’t have to bow down to little tin gods. I’m only here because—’

‘No, Liz,’ interposed Simon urgently. ‘Don’t say.’

‘I wouldn’t be here at all if it wasn’t—’

‘Stop it!’ It was Jean. ‘Stop it at once, Liz. No.’

There was a sudden strength in her, which indeed checked Liz. But it attracted Devereaux’s attention. He transferred his gaze to Jean.

‘Well,’ he said evenly. ‘What’s all this about, I wonder? Your relationship with this volunteer seems extraordinarily close, Jean.’

‘Not close, Director.’ She improvised: ‘Liz and Simon were—unhappy when they first came here. I tried to be kind to them. They’re only children.’

‘Is that all there is to it?’ asked Devereaux suspiciously. He looked elsewhere. ‘Beth?’

Beth paused a moment before speaking. Then she drew herself up and said: ‘I have to report that just before the alarm went, Director, these two volunteers were in your office again.’

Liz and Simon were both outraged by this, but the colour rose instantly to Devereaux’s face. He thrust himself at Simon, as though he could attack him.

‘What is it you’re trying to do here?’ he cried. ‘What?’

‘Nothing! Just find out things.’

‘What things?’

‘There’s plenty to find out, isn’t there?’

Simon’s slender supply of pluck was petering out, but he held the other’s gaze as bravely as he could. Devereaux calmed down, perhaps again not wishing to show weakness before his staff. ‘I see,’ he observed grimly. ‘It’s obvious I shall have to devote more attention to you two than I’d realized. You’ll be confined to quarters until further notice too.’ Then he thought again. ‘No, not to quarters—somewhere we can keep a constant eye on you. The Fantasy Room, Beth. Drop an electronic shield around them.’

Simon and Liz were puzzled by this, but Beth merely nodded curtly. Devereaux’s eyes drifted again to Jean, to Larry; then without another word he turned for his office. There was silence until he had disappeared.

‘So what’s the score, Beth?’ asked Larry easily. ‘Do you think everything that goes wrong around here can be put down to—human error?’

‘Don’t talk to me, please, Larry,’ Beth rejoined stiffly. ‘You’re confined to quarters.’

‘I know.’ He grinned ruefully. ‘Untouchable at last. That’s what you wanted, isn’t it? Well, you got your wish.’

He started off down the corridor towards the living quarters, his shoulders hunched. Liz suddenly boiled over with rage and resentment.

‘I’ll never grow up to be like you,’ she shouted at Beth. ‘Never!’

In the computer room, alone, Bukov was very busy. An outside observer might even have thought him obsessed, as he ran from bastion to control panel and back again, setting in motion a tape. At length he came to rest before a screen, pressing down appropriate controls. The screen crackled, then ran with a graph reading. It chattered across as Bukov watched, tense and impatient.

For a minute nothing happened; then the screen went dead. Bukov stared tautly, his lips moving as he seemed to count off seconds. The graph appeared again, and he ran a hand over his face, manifestly worried. He scurried back to the bastion, stopped the tape and wound it back. Once more he set it in motion.

By the time Bukov had returned to the screen, the graph was again moving across it. Once more he watched with small patience. He was like a man in the grip of a repeating pattern of thought, going over and over it in his head, until such time as it would cease to be a preoccupation and resolve itself into comprehension and an addition to his sum of knowledge.

In the Director's office, the blue screen activated, and the caption clicked across:

DIRECTOR TO COMPUTER... DETAIL MEMORY BANK 11:00
HOURS JULY 17th... HA57 DOSAGE IN RESPECT E JOYNTON
MANUFACTURED STRICTEST CONFORMITY INSTRUCTION
TAPES... NO EVIDENCE ERROR IN OPERATIONAL PROCESS...
SUGGEST DEPTH CHECK... ENDS...

Beth was bewildered. 'But that's the computer's answer, Director,' she declared. 'No evidence of error in the operational process. So

Larry couldn't have been responsible.'

'Odd,' replied Devereaux, frowning. 'One could even say provoking. But the computer doesn't make mistakes.' He seemed piqued rather than in any way disconcerted. 'A depth check—yes, that's what we need. But wait a moment: how shall we angle it?'

Beth's hand was poised over the control panel to preempt this operation from the computer, but Devereaux began to pace up and down his office, rubbing his chin. He stopped before the door to the back room.

'You know, Beth,' he said reflectively, 'I meant it when I told you I needed a personal assistant. But I must be sure of you.'

She was taken aback that his mind should have gone in this direction so apparently arbitrarily, but quickly replied, 'Director, I've done everything I know to prove to you I'm utterly loyal.'

'Yes, that's true.' He nodded, as though weighing up a number of variables. 'I've given you the servicing of the inner computer here because there was nobody else I could possibly trust with the task. But do you know what that computer is actually *for*, Beth?'

A little shiver ran through Beth. She could not completely understand why mention of this private task she performed for the Director should so trouble her; she had understood that it was a confidential commission when she had taken it on; now it was like betraying secrets even to call it to mind. Devereaux had apparently not expected an answer to his question, for he turned and moved to Beth, his eyes shrewd.

'You doubted—you still doubt—that those volunteers, Liz and Simon, were properly selected by the computer,' he stated.

'There were reasons for that,' Beth returned hesitantly. But I've come to think—'

‘You trusted your own intuition as against the clear terms of the directive. Yet as it happens... that isn’t always reprehensible, Beth.’

Now Beth didn’t understand at all. Devereaux seemed to be smiling at her, somehow pleased. ‘I believe when the truth is finally known, you may simply find you’ve been suspicious of Liz and Simon for the wrong reasons,’ he went on. ‘Larry wasn’t responsible for an error in the operational process today. It therefore automatically follows—that someone else must have been.’

In spite of herself, a little gasp rose in Beth. ‘Liz and Simon?’

‘Someone who deliberately interfered—and then carefully covered tracks. We’d better angle our depth check around the complete history of those volunteers, hadn’t we? Because, Beth, we must get at the truth.’

His smile was broader now; as lightsome perhaps as Beth had ever seen it. But as she turned back to the control panel, she was possessed by a movement of fear. For the first time since she came to the ice-box, Beth realized, she didn’t like the turn things had taken.

Strong lights beat down in a square all about them; pillars of fire, Simon thought idly. The pillars’ part was right anyway, for the light quite locked him and Liz in. The rest of the Fantasy Room was visible all round them, but they could not move beyond those shafts of light. Invisible walls restrained them.

For the hundredth time, Simon poked at the electronic shield. ‘I wonder how they do it?’ he muttered. ‘Force field of some sort, I suppose...’

‘Oh, who cares?’ Liz grunted back, busy languishing. ‘If you haven’t got anything helpful to say, then don’t talk at all.’

Simon didn’t mind this injunction, for he was busy with his thoughts. It had come to him eventually that he had been a little

naive to think that Devereaux's testament—which in spite of everything he still hoped to find—would be something written down. In fact it now seemed that the really extraordinary thing would be if it *were*. The ice-box and its electronic gadgets offered much better means of recording information than inscribing it on paper. Which brought him logically back to that computer... the small computer in the Director's back room...

'Liz.'

They both turned at the soft call. Beyond the imprisoning lights was Jean. She hastened over.

'You've got to get away from here.' She seemed a little frantic. 'We must find a way.'

'But I can't leave you here, can I?' Liz wanted to know. 'And what about Daddy?'

'Darling, all that doesn't matter now! They're going to give you new arms and legs, and—'

'No,' said Simon suddenly. Liz and her mother both blinked at him; there seemed something new in his tone. But it only lasted a second, for he was almost apologetic as he went on: 'I mean, they'd *like* to. It's even on the schedule. But I don't think it can happen. This is the future time for Liz and me, right? Well, I don't see how anything can happen to you in a future time that isn't *actually* going to happen one day. In other words, unless we're truly meant to come to the ice-box in 1990—then we'll stay as we are, no matter what.'

'But perhaps we *are* meant to come to the ice-box in 1990,' objected Liz.

'No,' said Simon, assertive again.

Liz was beginning to get irritated with him. 'How do you know?'

'Because if you're coming here at all, you're coming as Beth. And *she* hasn't got new arms and legs.'

Liz was less impressed by the logic of this than by the fact that he seemed to be saying she had no choice but to be Beth one day. She turned to flare at him, but Jean had spoken.

‘No, Liz, be still. Perhaps there’s something in what Simon says... The future’s always a mystery. I can’t even remember *why* things happened to me as they did. Coming here was a terrible mistake.’

‘You mean, it could have been different, Mrs Skinner?’ Simon frowned.

‘Well of course, Simon. If I hadn’t let Beth take that intelligence-enhancement course, say. We could just have stayed and somehow helped Frank build up his business again. Kept on living normally.’

Simon clicked his fingers sharply. ‘Then that’s it!’ he cried. ‘It’s got to be.’

‘What is what?’ a baffled Liz asked.

‘Liz, don’t you see? Commander Traynor said when we went into the past that it was because of the energy that still existed—’

‘Oh, him again. Why will you keep bringing Traynor up?’

‘But this is the future. The *real* energy doesn’t exist yet. So it’s got to be energy of another sort. Energy not even outside someone’s mind as yet. Maybe... not outside your mother’s mind.’

They stared at him. This time the conviction of his tone didn’t fail, and even though it remained essentially inexplicable, what he had said held for both Liz and Jean a ring of truth. ‘Then—then I don’t *have* to be Beth after all,’ said Liz slowly.

‘No.’

‘And I wouldn’t have to be here...’ This from Jean. She looked to them behind the electronic shield, a new urgency in her eyes. ‘Simon, you and Liz have got to get back through the time barrier. It’s more important than ever. I must be—’

‘Warned.’ Simon nodded, accepting the novelty of his own deductions with complete *savoir-faire*. ‘Yes, that’s right, Mrs Skinner. We’ve got to get back to our own time and tell you all about this. So that it will never happen.’

HAVING OBEDIENTLY CLOSED himself up in his quarters, presetting the electronic lock outside, Larry was idly watching an old film re-run when he heard a loud click, and, like Liz, found his door open again. Like Liz, too, he found no one had come formally to release him. He made his way back to the computer room, reflecting that this was the justice of the ice-box; guilty until you're proved innocent, innocent as soon as nobody wants to call you guilty any more.

'The Director giveth, the Director taketh away,' he announced to Bukov, but then paused, for the other's face was singularly grim as he marked a number of computer tapes, placing them in a large case. 'What's going on?'

'Larry,' said Bukov thoughtfully, 'did you know that Edith Joynton and I had a special job here in the ice-box? To keep the Director under observation?'

'What?'

'It's true. The details don't matter.'

'But—'

'What matters is that I'm going to trust you,' declared Bukov more loudly. 'I have to trust someone with poor Edith gone. These tapes'—

he held up the case—‘they’re vital to a report I must make. Remember it. In case anything should ever happen to me.’

Larry felt his grip on reality slipping. ‘Bukov, old comrade, you’re talking like a pre-ice-box movie. What’s going to happen to you?’

‘It happened to Edith,’ replied Bukov shortly, and proceeded with the case to a locker, where he put it in, indicating to Larry that he was secreting the key on a chain round his neck.

Devereaux seemed tired all at once. ‘Come along, Beth,’ he protested irritably. ‘Haven’t you got that depth check on Liz and Simon yet?’

It was certainly taking more time than he had supposed. Replying only ‘Proceeding, Director’, Beth turned back to depress a button marked ‘Priority imperative’. It was almost impossible to hurry the computer in its operations, but one could at least let it know one was still patiently waiting. The delay meant, of course, that the computer had discovered some sort of problem in investigating Liz and Simon, and was probing it through to the bitter end. Again Beth experienced her *frisson* of fear.

The Director scowled, looked to the back-room door. Suddenly he crossed to this, operated the control in the jamb so that it opened. Then he disappeared into the darkness.

Beth saw none of this, for, at the same moment, the blue screen had begun to activate. The message chattered out:

DETAIL MEMORY BANK 14:20 HOURS JULY 8TH... REFERENCE
VOLUNTEERS FOR AB EXPERIMENT... ERROR IN PREVIOUS
INSTRUCTION REPEAT ERROR IN PREVIOUS INSTRUCTION...

DO NOT EXPECT ARRIVAL AS SCHEDULED... CHANGE OF PLAN... ENDS...

Beth gasped in astonishment. 'Director,' she cried, operating a switch so that the message, instead of fading, froze on the screen. 'Director, come and look!' But then a glance behind showed both that Devereaux was nowhere to be seen and that the back-room door was open. Beth paused instinctively, but only for a moment. If anything was an emergency, this was. She hurried through into the other room.

The lights came up as she entered, revealing Devereaux standing centrally, his eyes on a clear perspex slab that formed as it were the centrepiece of the little computer complex. Beth had never known what it was for. Director, there's an important message,' she announced. 'I think you'd better come and—'

But Devereaux whirled round, like a man disturbed in the deepest of contemplation. 'Why are you here?' he asked blankly.

'I've isolated an important message from the memory bank—'

'How dare you!' Suddenly the Director's eyes were blazing at her. 'Don't you know I allow no one in this room when I'm here? I give you privileges, and you abuse them! I'm alone here—quite alone. You're like all the others...'

His voice stopped, choking off in mid-sentence. To her alarm, Beth saw he seemed frozen halfway through a movement. His eyes had dropped closed. He seemed unconscious.

Beth didn't know what to do. A quick sensation of fright numbed her brain. There was something eerie about it all: something that did not bear rational analysis. She turned and hurried for the office again.

Beth was still clinging to the control panel here, collecting herself, when Devereaux came out of the back room and closed the door over. 'Ah, Beth,' he said, as though nothing had occurred within. 'It's all right—you can call off the search. I've been assured through personal depth-contact that Liz and Simon are the parties responsible for Edith Joynton's death.'

Beth was shocked now. 'But they can't be. They shouldn't even have been in the ice-box.'

'What did you say?'

'The computer says here there was a change of plan,' Beth stumbled. 'It even says—'

'Are you mad?' Devereaux's eyes were alight again, his voice a tone higher. 'So easily deceived? That message is a forgery.'

Beth could only stare at him, nameless fright rising in her throat. Devereaux moved for the door, loosening the clothing about his neck as though all at once too warm. 'It's only a matter of establishing clearly what has gone before... No such message was ever given to me on brain link to the computer, so therefore it can never have existed! Liz and Simon again, I fear; trying to upset the unity between me and the computer... destroy my work...'

He went out. At a loss, deeply confused, Beth looked back to the blue screen with its locked-on message. One word seemed to stand out from the yellow print, filling her eye: Error... Regret ERROR... *ERROR...*

Out in the corridor, Devereaux said to Larry, who was passing, 'Isn't it a bit warm in here tonight? You'd better check the temperature control.'

'Of course, Director. At once.'

But as the other went on his way, Larry began to say to himself 'silly old foo—' until he too noticed that it was curiously stuffy. Puzzled, he turned for the computer room. As he passed Devereaux's office, the door opened, and an agitated Beth came out.

'Larry,' she said rapidly. 'I've got to talk to you.'

Larry was thrown off balance, to say the least. 'Since when would you want to talk to me?'

'There was a computer instruction some little time ago telling us the AB experiment wasn't to be proceeded with and not to expect volunteers. Is that right?'

'Yes.' Larry was mystified. 'Yes, I remember that.'

'Then it wasn't a forgery?'

'What are you talking about? Look, I just thought it had been countermanded, the way these things often are. The Director had it all on brain link anyway, so he's the one to ask.'

'On brain link,' echoed Beth; and could not prevent a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach.

'Larry!' It was Bukov, calling from the computer room, the door of which had just sprung open. 'Come quickly. There's something wrong with the heating. It's reached eighty, and still climbing.'

'What?' cried Beth.

Together, they raced into the computer room. Bukov was standing before the control panel, indicating a dial. Sure enough, the needle was rising ominously.

'It may just be a circuit fuse going,' diagnosed Larry. 'Hold on.' He ran to a wall cupboard which he wrenched open. Within was a complex pattern of terminals and slot-in fuses. Larry speedily released a bank of these, which fell back at the touch of a lever.

In the Fantasy Room, abruptly the overhead lights that beamed down to imprison Liz and Simon cut dead. Simon's head jerked upwards. He was never afterwards to understand completely what had happened; but it took only a split-second for him to realize that it *had* happened, and that was all that signified.

'Quick—we're free,' he yelled, grabbing Liz's hand and dragging her for the door.

'But Simon—what in the world...' By that time they were out in the corridor. 'The entrance area, Liz,' snapped Simon. 'Get a suit on and go back through the barrier.'

'But you—'

'No, I'm staying for a bit. Devereaux's testament.'

'You're crazy,' Liz began in horror, but again he cut her short, a strength she hadn't thought him capable of in his voice.

'I want to know about HA57,' he insisted. 'For me, not anyone else! But you've got to get back and warn your mother. Now don't dawdle about! Move!'

'I won't go without you! It's not right! I'll—'

'Oh, gawd,' exclaimed Simon, quite losing his *savoir-faire*. 'Get lost, Liz. Scatter.'

And grabbing her by the arm, he propelled her physically towards the entrance area, thrusting her roughly out and forcing closed the intervening door.

'Gauge still climbing, Larry,' said Beth, with Bukov before the computer-room control panel. Larry banged the slot-in fuses back into place, hurriedly returned to them. Now he was worried.

'I don't understand it,' he said. 'Fuses all okay. Seems to be—just a power surge.'

‘Just another interruption in the standard process, then,’ nodded Bukov. ‘Like the water supply cut-off, the reactor failure.’

‘We’ve certainly had a lot of it lately.’

‘Too much,’ said Beth suddenly, and with a curious edge to her voice. ‘Because look, the gauge is going down again. Dropping.’ There was no doubt but that it was. Beth looked to her companions. ‘I find this all too odd,’ she ended. ‘I want to know why.’

Bukov and Larry glanced at her sharply. There was a new interest in her eyes, a genuine curiosity.

Liz was dismal as she clambered into the thermal suit and hurried up the tunnel to the ice field above. Nobody appeared to prevent her, so she had time to reflect that she was sick of being pushed around; probably sick of being a girl if all it meant in the end was that people like Simon managed to do what they wanted while you just got sent home like a wilful child.

Liz had crossed the ice now, and was about to slip off her suit again so that she could jump through the time barrier. But a strange thing gave her pause; the slabs, the queer oblong blocks of ice that up till then had seemed to her only a kind of landmark, were changing in character. The clinging hoar frost that usually clouded and obscured them was for some reason melting away, rendering them glassy and transparent. Thus it was that Liz observed with a little shock that the slab nearest her contained a prone form—that of a human being.

Liz moved closer. Then something rose up from deep within her; something that would have been a scream of terror if it had ever passed her lips. She had recognized the figure frozen into the ice

before her. Through the clear crust, as though a window, she could see his face. And it was her father, Frank Skinner.

SLOWLY, ever so slowly, the world began to revolve for Liz. Her eyes remained fixed on her father's face, ashen and silent there beyond the ice; so that he became as it were the centre point in a universe that had, quite unreasonably, started to swing round in a circle. It was Frank, Liz knew utterly objectively, no mistake about that. His eyes were closed and he could have been dead. But then, the great whiteness was wheeling all about her, and bright stars stood out in the velvet under her feet. And there was a curious ringing somewhere; clanging, insistent, like the alarm that had summoned them all to look on the grim remains of Edith Joynton.

So Liz slumped in a faint to the icy ground. She could not see, and would not have understood if she had seen, that the gauge at the foot of the slab where Frank Skinner lay was reading 'danger', and had as a consequence set off an urgent signal within the ice-box.

'Well?' inquired Devereaux with a kind of belligerence. 'Whose fault is it this time, Bukov? Whose?'

Frank Skinner lay under an oxygen tent in the infirmary, and Jean sat anxiously by his side. Liz was on the opposite side of the bed, still shattered herself perhaps, but determinedly vigilant; elsewhere Beth hovered nervously. Bukov turned from adjusting a tap on a cylinder to eye the irate Director.

‘I don’t know,’ he said evenly. ‘There was that strange rise in temperature. It obviously had the effect of thawing the hibernation slabs outside.’

‘What on earth caused the rise in temperature?’ demanded Devereaux. ‘And how did the volunteers escape?’ He strode over to Liz. ‘You were imprisoned behind an electronic shield in the Fantasy Room. How did you get free?’

‘Oh, Director—can’t you see she’s upset?’ Liz had been able merely to turn abstracted eyes on Devereaux, and Jean was rising to her defence. ‘All this has been a terrible shock to her. She wanted to get away from this place because she was unhappy. But she came across those slabs outside and—and didn’t understand.’

‘Like Beth and I do, she means, Director,’ Bukov chimed in, and the other’s gaze went quickly back to him. ‘Beth and I are among the privileged, because whenever there is a problem here we understand that we are required to start with the answers and then look for the questions. It’s a good system, don’t you think, Beth? It means, for instance, that one only has to breathe the phrase “human error” to account for every possible discrepancy even before it’s happened.’

‘Please, Doctor Bukov.’ Beth turned away, upset and as yet in no state to cope with this kind of thing. But there was uncertainty in the very line of her stance.

Bukov had spoken in an unusually pointed manner, and the effect was not lost on Devereaux. He frowned at the other, for the first time

something almost apprehensive about him. He snapped, 'What's the matter with you, Bukov?' and, not waiting for an answer, added, 'Where is Simon?'

At precisely that moment Simon was in fact in an airless cupboard, and beginning to wake up to it that he must move soon or perish. He had heard all the alarms and excursions, had understood enough to tell him that Skinner had been in the slab of ice, a long-term hibernation subject. He inched open the door and moved cautiously out into the corridor, hopeful now that the brouhaha was over. There didn't seem to be anyone about, so, his mind back on the testament that he still meant to secure, he moved swiftly and silently to Devereaux's office. This was deserted too; Simon went determinedly on into the back room.

The light 'came with him', and he found himself in the centre of the little computer complex. He was just looking round, wondering how best to proceed, when an odd clicking sound took his ear. At first he could not place it; but then it became obvious it was emerging from the clear perspex block before him. Simon moved to regard this, feeling it, peering into it. It was smooth to the touch and seemed purposeless. Then his eye fell on what looked like a solitary control set into a squat pillar which supported the block. Simon turned this gently.

For a second nothing happened, then the lights of the room faded slowly down. And, as Simon watched, a kind of turbulence began in the heart of the block; spreading out in quick little wisps, becoming ever more dense, like an encroaching and thickening fog...

‘I’m going up to my quarters to rest,’ said Devereaux, a sudden tiredness in voice and limb. ‘You’ve no right to speak to me like that, Bukov.’ There was no doubt now but that the Director was badly troubled.

Devereaux vanished from the room, and Bukov gazed a long moment at Beth, who avoided his eyes. Then Bukov went out too.

‘Oh, Mummy.’ Liz lifted her eyes wearily from Skinner behind the oxygen tent to Jean. ‘Why didn’t you tell me?’

‘How could I?’ Jean was in tears. ‘You would never have understood. You know you wouldn’t.’

‘Will he be all right?’

‘Of course he will,’ asserted Beth, still standing apart. ‘It’s a regulated experiment, all the factors controlled by the computer.’

‘It was your idea though, wasn’t it?’

‘The hibernation experiment is different from anything else we’re doing here,’ Beth went on bluntly. ‘We’ve still to show that long-term freezing produces no ill-effects. This particular experiment must now be accounted a failure. Frank should have remained in the ice for ten years at least.’

‘Ten years!’ Horror started from Liz’s eyes.

‘It was the specified period. He knew that when he volunteered.’

Liz swung on Jean again. ‘Did he volunteer, Mummy?’

‘Of course, dear,’ replied Jean.

‘You don’t sound so sure.’

‘It’s confidential information,’ cut in Beth loudly. ‘You’ve no right to it.’

‘But I want to know!’

‘Very well, Liz.’ Jean was suddenly affirmative. ‘Frank’s volunteering for the hibernation experiment—was a condition of our coming to the ice-box.’

‘Jean!’ cried Beth.

Jean sighed, tired and hopeless. ‘Oh, what’s the good of evading the truth any more, Beth? In the beginning, Liz, the authorities simply had no use for your father here. Then they said that if he would do this... I could come with Beth, as I wanted to.’

‘And *that’s* why he did it?’ demanded Liz, her voice shaking. ‘Just so you could be with Beth?’

In answer, Jean only looked back to her husband, pale and unconscious beneath the oxygen tent. But a sudden, almost animal anger claimed Liz.

‘This is... a wicked place,’ she cried. Then she leapt up and ran to Beth. ‘You know that too at last, don’t you? Just like Mummy.’

‘Go away.’ Beth could not bear those eyes, so recognizably her own now, accusing her. ‘You’re nothing to do with me.’

‘But I am. I *am* you. Only you’re not me, that’s the trouble. You’ve changed too much. Better intelligence. Scientific progress. And your little tin god of a Director.’ Beth started for the door.

‘Wait!’ Suddenly Liz had dashed after her, catching her arm and pulling her round. And, to her surprise, Liz found she was not angry any more. She was sad, overwhelmingly sad, and in some part of her desperate. ‘Please, Beth,’ she said, near tears herself. ‘Don’t go. Don’t you see? We can’t escape from each other, you and I. We mustn’t...’

And it seemed to her clear, at least for a moment, that Beth understood. Like gazed out upon like; in the heart, after all, no enduring separation.

Jean shifted uneasily in her chair by Skinner’s bed. It could have been her imagination, but it seemed to her that now it was getting very cold.

'IT'S NOTHING,' insisted Devereaux, staring at the gauge on the control panel in the computer room. 'Three degrees below normal. That's not an unusual variation.'

They had called him from rest to report that the temperature was now going down instead of up; to refer to his authority yet another arbitrary deviation from the norm. Why was it all happening? He looked round to Bukov and Larry, covering as best he could what was an instinctive surge of panic. But Bukov observed it well enough, and was satisfied. The time had come for him to act.

'Director,' he said, 'I have to tell you that I have information concerning the things that have been going wrong here. I was intending to make it part of a report to the International Commission, but now I see I must show it to you.' Devereaux stared at him. 'What authority have you to make a report to the International Commission?' he demanded.

'From the beginning Edith Joynton and I had a special brief. To report on you.'

He swung for the wall cupboard, unlocking it with the key strung round his neck and taking out the case of computer tapes. Devereaux's jaw had dropped. 'You were to report on *ME* ?'

‘This case contains computer instruction tapes,’ announced Bukov, opening it.

‘I don’t believe that you and Doctor Joynton were detailed to spy on me! I’m in charge here.’

‘Each of these tapes contains a blank at a certain point—perhaps a critical point. There’s an interruption. Director... a break in programming.’

‘That’s impossible,’ snapped Devereaux.

‘Aren’t we starting with answers again—and working our way back to questions?’ Bukov was plainly not to be rattled, and Devereaux’s eyes said clearly enough that he had been frightened. ‘With your permission, Director,’ Bukov added politely, moving for a bastion to put the tape on.

At the panel, still watching the gauge, Larry looked up with a worried frown. ‘This is bad,’ he said. ‘Progressive deterioration. Five below normal now.’

Simon came out of the Director’s office a bit stunned. He knew what he had seen in there, in the back room, in the perspex block, but still couldn’t quite believe it. It came under the heading of unreal experiences, things you remember for a long time after they only *seem* to have happened. A door opened farther down the corridor, and he turned his head. Liz was coming out of the infirmary with Beth.

‘Simon,’ cried Liz, glad to see him now: but then stopped, taken aback by his pale cheeks and bright eyes. ‘What—what’s the matter?’

‘You’d better come and see,’ replied Simon shortly. ‘Yes. You too, Beth.’

Old habits of mind die hard. Beth saw the open door behind Simon, and at once flared. 'You haven't been in the Director's office again?' she cried. 'You've interfered too often—'

'I understand about the testament now,' said Simon loudly to Liz. And then to Beth: 'And you. You just don't know, do you? All you ever did was service that computer in the back room for Devereaux. You never knew what it was for...'

His very tension was enough to stop her. 'Come on,' he muttered. 'You've got to see.' He turned and went back into the office. Liz followed; as did Beth, willing it now.

The lights were very dim in the back room and the perspex slab glowed, swirling with thick mist, as Liz and Beth entered with Simon. Simon adjusted the control on the pillar. 'Just watch,' he whispered.

Imperceptibly, the mist began to clear within the slab.

What followed was hard to describe: at one stage Liz thought clearly 'Yes, it's a film', but an instant later knew that was a false judgement, related to her own inadequate understanding. It was an *experience*, more like, something outside time and space as they knew it, that might have taken seconds to apprehend or could have occupied years. It was obviously some sort of variation on the fantasy technique, and unfolded to them as it were the life of a man. Babyhood, school, advanced learning, the whole process of growth was made present and actual to them; they were *there* as the babe became a boy, the boy a young man. And it was just occurring to Liz that the face of the subject was somehow familiar when the strange mists clouded everything again and there was nothing more to be known. Then it hit her. The face was the face of Devereaux.

Liz whirled startled eyes towards Beth. 'What... what does it mean?' she gasped.

‘Do you know what the Director is, Beth?’ put in Simon. ‘What he truly is? Doctor Bukov told me once the Director was—a clone.’

‘What’s a clone?’ cried Liz.

Beth was plainly shaken. ‘No, Simon... no, that can’t be true.’

‘Will somebody tell me what a clone is?’ Liz was getting agitated.

‘Why, Liz,’ said Beth softly, ‘a clone is a person constructed from the genetic cells of someone else.’

‘From the other Devereaux who died years ago. That’s right.’ Simon nodded. ‘Nobody knew. And the Director is making sure it keeps on being that way...’ His eyes drifted back to the perspex slab, dense with glowing fog. ‘That’s what all this is for, you see. This computer is simply to build another clone of Devereaux. And what we’ve just seen... is how far he’s got. That’s the testament, too.’ He was rueful all at once. ‘I’ll never find the secret of the longevity drug now. Because it’s part of the new clone. When that becomes mature—it’ll be Devereaux all over again. And the secret will *still* be safe in his head...’

There was a long silence in the little room. Then Beth hugged herself, shivering. ‘It’s cold,’ she whispered. So cold.’

‘Seven below,’ reported Larry anxiously. ‘For God’s sake, can’t we find out what’s wrong? We’ll ice over at this rate.’

‘The fault is in the programming,’ specified Bukov, still deliberately calm. ‘The Director checks every operation of the computer, daily, on brain link. The computer can’t make mistakes, we know. But if it should happen that the Director, while programming—perhaps unknown to himself—’

‘Lies,’ shouted Devereaux suddenly, unwilling to face a truth of this order, if truth it was. ‘You’re trying to make out I’ve made

mistakes. But I know the reason for that. You're jealous of me here, Bukov. You'd like me out of the way.'

'You won't hear what I've got to say then?' Bukov indicated the tape he had secured on the bastion. 'I want us to analyse this instruction tape together, Director. You'll be able to observe the blanks for yourself. You'll be forced to realize—'

Abruptly Devereaux had started for the door. Bukov temporized no longer. Springing after him with ready agility, the big Russian seized the Director bodily and hurled him back into the centre of the room. 'Throw an electronic shield around him, Larry,' he barked. 'I'll take the responsibility. I'm assuming command before that heat level falls below tolerance.'

Larry lunged at the panel, needing no second bidding. Bright shafts of light stung down from the ceiling, enclosing Devereaux in a narrow circle as he picked himself up off the floor, panting. The door from the corridor opened and Beth hurried in, Liz and Simon behind her.

'Beth,' sobbed Devereaux. 'Help me! An emergency signal to Central Control...'

But Beth could only stare, utterly astounded. Bukov raced to the tape on the bastion, setting it in motion. 'I have no choice, Beth,' he called back. 'Wait and see for yourself. The Director's mistakes will kill us if I don't take over.'

A screen on the control panel had rapidly activated; curious symbols, indecipherable to Liz and only remotely comprehensible to Simon, chased each other across the gleaming area. 'It's the tape from yesterday morning. Director—your programming of the HA57 dosage. It was because her dosage was incorrect that Edith Joynton died.'

‘More lies,’ shouted Devereaux. ‘Beth, can’t you see what they’re doing to me? You understand. You *know*. Help me...’

But still Beth could only stand and stare. The symbols chattered across the screen; then abruptly stopped dead. There was a good five seconds blank before they took up again. Seeing this, Devereaux froze in a kind of horror. A little sound, no more than an escape of breath, broke from him. A general silence descended over the room and its occupants.

‘It’s because you suffer from blackouts, Director,’ said Bukov at length, gentle now. ‘Did you know this?’ The stunned Devereaux could not reply. ‘They are beyond your control. Really—must we analyse the other tapes? The ones relating to the water supply—the summoning of volunteers? You know the truth now. The temperature is falling. It’s your doing. You must go on brain link at once to save us. You must correct the error.’

‘Error,’ muttered Devereaux, barely audible. ‘All this time... error...’

Bukov looked to Larry, nodded silently. Larry touched a switch and the electronic shield disintegrated, dying away in a long glow. He ran to bring forward the steel table with its terminals. Bukov indicated to the Director.

‘No...’ Devereaux seemed to understand that he was free of his cage, but at another level remained confused and dazed. ‘It can’t be so. My brain—and the computer... the most reliable combination in the world.’

‘Not much time left. Director,’ insisted Bukov. ‘You must re-programme.’

‘No!’ Devereaux abruptly cringed away from them, a man in pain. ‘I don’t believe you. You’re deceiving me—all of you! Working against me...’ They could only regard him, dismayed now rather than

shocked. All his arrogance seemed to have returned in a flood. 'As you have been from the beginning! You, Beth—Bukov—everyone. You're not worthy of me. I leave you... leave you to your fate...'

It took everyone by surprise. In a second he had overturned the gleaming steel table before him, and leapt for the door even as the sensitive terminals clattered to the floor and smashed. 'Wait, Director!' shouted Bukov, plunging after him. 'You've got to re-programme.'

In his fury, in his madness if it was that, Devereaux had a wild strength. Bukov caught him in a fierce grip out in the corridor; but even before Larry could arrive to help, he had smashed a blinding blow into the Russian's face, driving him helplessly back against the wall. Then he had sped away, avoiding Larry's violent tackle, down towards the entrance area, the tunnel, the deadly ice field outside. There had been a slight improvement in the external temperature, as it happened—it was now only seventy below rather than eighty—but long before anyone could effectively follow and save him from his own turbulence of mind, such cold as lay over and above the desolate terrain had pierced into Devereaux like a knife, bringing him gasping to his knees and then choking to his belly. In such circumstances, a man only takes a few minutes to die. There is no telling what Devereaux last thought before the end. Perhaps in spite of all, that he remained the finest mind in the world. For such men, be they men born of mothers or men created of science, seldom ever change. Their tragedy is that they cannot face what it is to be wrong. They are thus not fully human, and so they perish.

Within the ice-box, conditions kept on deteriorating, so now there was nothing for it but the anti-freeze. The cupboard was rapidly

broken open, the final SOS dispatched to Central Control, the phials handed out to the personnel. Beth sat on the floor of the computer room, against the desk, consuming the saving fluid. It brought on a quick drowsiness, and then insensibility. Liz was happy to see that, as she slipped into unconsciousness, Beth leaned against Larry, who was next to her, glad of his friendship and support at last. The future to Liz didn't in all respects look as grim as it might have done. But Simon, who also observed this, merely noted the phenomenon and wondered.

There remained Jean and Frank in the infirmary.

'Take it. Mummy,' said Liz, shivering as she handed her the phials. 'You and Frank. It'll keep you alive till help arrives.'

In the grip of the cold, afraid both for herself and her husband, Jean could only ask, 'Why, Liz? What's happened?'

'You must take it, that's all! Simon and I are going back through the barrier now. All this...' Her eyes travelled round about her, to come inevitably back to the woman who in any time and place would always be her mother. '...all this—won't happen. I promise you. Mummy. It won't...'

So Liz and Simon again put on thermal suits and made their way back to the barrier and their own time. There would be much to tell Jean and Frank; but not so much to share with Traynor, whose greed for information Simon now knew well and, in some part of himself, feared.

One last thing happened within the ice-box that Liz and Simon for obvious reasons could not then observe, but afterwards supposed must have taken place. In the back room off the Director's office, the perspex slab in the centre of the little computer complex cracked

jaggedly as it contracted; then splintered into myriad pieces; so that whatever lay beyond it, whatever strange life it sheltered, was by the intense cold cut off from its vital source, and scientifically terminated.

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